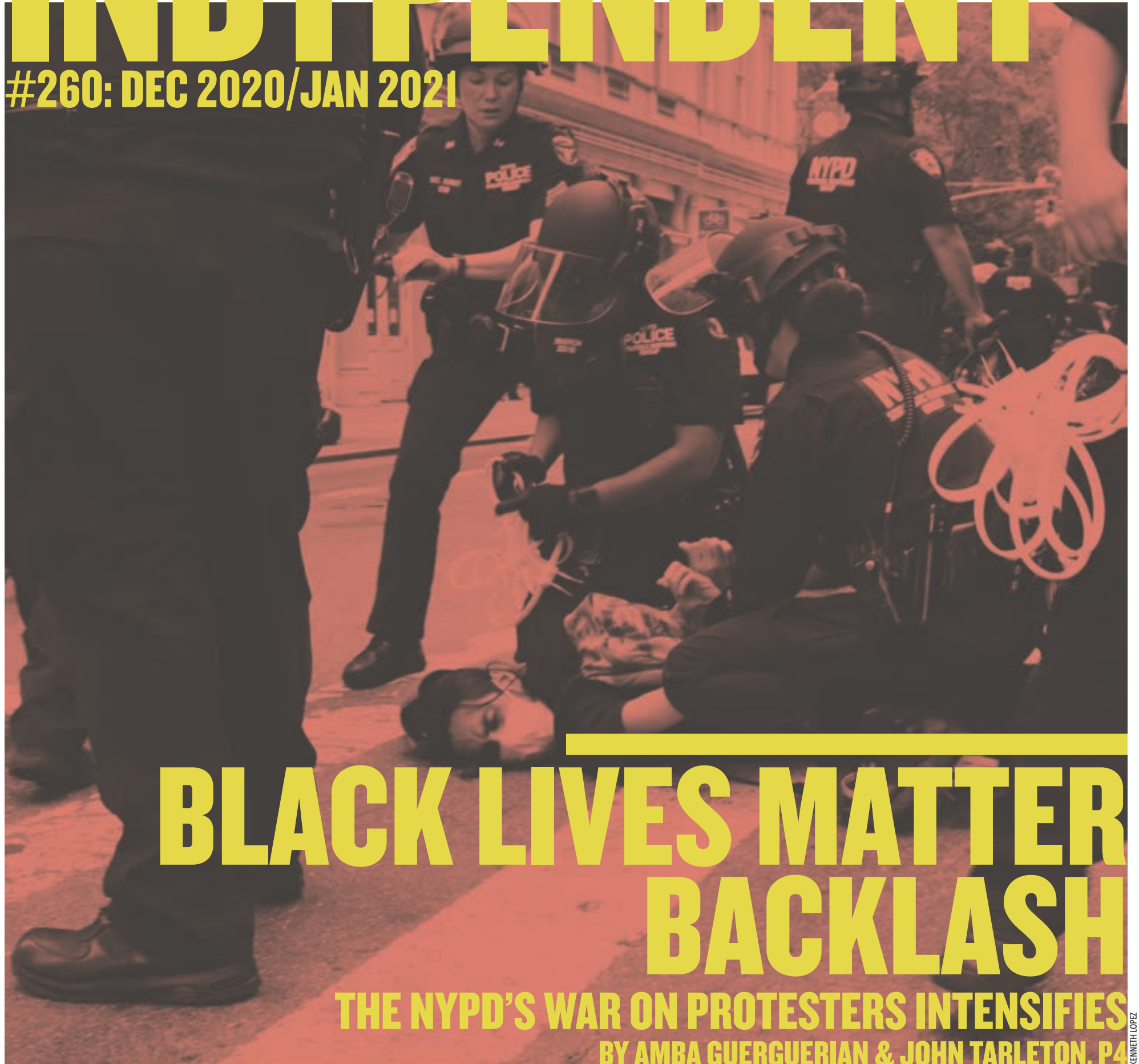


THE

= WHAT WE LEARNED IN THE TRUMP ERA — P12 =

INDYPENDENT

#260: DEC 2020/JAN 2021



BLACK LIVES MATTER BACKLASH

THE NYPD'S WAR ON PROTESTERS INTENSIFIES
BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN & JOHN TARLETON, P4

KENNETH LOPEZ

A graphic with a blue and white geometric background, featuring a red mailbox with a blue face and a newspaper labeled 'INDY'. The mailbox is wearing a blue face mask. The background has a sunburst pattern and several small red virus-like icons.

STILL STANDING

HELP US KEEP IT THAT WAY IN 2021. SEE PAGES 2 & 24.


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EDITOR'S NOTE

**IT'S THE MOMENT WE'VE BEEN WAIT-
ING FOR.**

Donald Trump is trudging across the
White House Lawn one last time.

The Marine One helicopter awaits
with its rotor blades whirring.

Two Marine Corps guards stiffly sa-
lute as Trump walks up the stairs. He
turns and gives the thumbs up sign to
his supporters. He's wearing his trade-
mark red-and-white MAGA hat.

And then he disappears into the
belly of the giant metal insect, is lift-
ed up into the sky and carried far, far
away to gilded exile at Mar-a-Lago
and hopefully to an endless barrage
of lawsuits, indictments, trials and
criminal convictions.

Truth is, we don't know what Donald
Trump's final moments as President
will look like. He could skulk away in
the dark of night before the Inaugura-
tion. Or, he could barricade himself in
a White House bathroom madly tweet-
ing at his supporters to come to his
aid even as his successor is sworn into
office. However it goes down, Trump's
presidency will be over on 12:01pm on
January 20, 2021. Nonetheless,

- *Trumpism won't be over.*
- *The D.C. swamp now
headed by Joe Biden
won't be over.*
- *Everything that is rotten
about a rigged political
and economic system*

*that privileges the few at
the expense of the many
won't be over.*

- *The Forever Wars won't be
over. Nor Climate Change.*
- *The need for visionary
social movements and
candidates striving for
transformative change
both outside and inside
the system won't be over.*
- *For New York City, the
scourge of austerity
won't be over.*
- *And the need for a me-
dia outlet like The Indy-
pendent that combines
shoe-leather reporting
and incisive analysis of
the issues and the grass-
roots movements that
matter most certainly
won't be over.*

2020 has been a year like no other.
We've persevered through a once-
in-a-century pandemic — continuing
to publish our print edition while ex-
panding our online presence, launch-
ing a weekly one-hour radio show on
WBAI and hosting monthly Zoom dis-
cussions with prominent progressive
organizers and thought leaders. And
we continue to provide a unique space
where young progressive journalists
can hone their skills while going out
and covering our wounded but still
amazing city.

Over these past two decades, *The
Indy* has emerged as a unique New
York City institution. Think of it as a

vaccine against the corporate propa-
ganda and the lazy conventional wis-
dom that is commonplace in much of
the media. In June, shortly after we
came out with a special edition amid
the George Floyd protests, one of our
readers, Priscilla Felia, sent us a hand-
written note describing her reaction to
seeing the new issue in one of our red-
and-white outdoor newsboxes.

"I nearly jumped out of my sandals,"
she wrote in a neat, handwritten script.
"I was so excited I had to take extras
for friends."

We hope to give *Indy* readers many
more reasons to leap out of their shoes
in 2021. But to do that, we need your
support now more than ever.

Our ad revenues have dropped due
to the pandemic. Some of our major
funders have had to scale back their
support. We've tightened our belt ac-
cordingly. But we can only take that so
far. We know not everyone is able to
give during these difficult times. But if
you can do so, please give generously
this year.

With your support, anything is pos-
sible.

In Solidarity,
JOHN TARLETON
The Indypendent

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AUTHOR OF *UNFORGETTING: A MEMOIR OF FAMILY, MIGRATION,
GANGS & REVOLUTION IN THE AMERICAS.*
TO SIGN UP, VISIT INDYPENDENT.ORG/ROBERTO-LOVATO.**

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The Good Reverend's healing tips for holiday loneliness and how to approach holiday shopping.

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More great reasons you should give to The Indy during this year's annual winter fund drive.



BRIEFING ROOM

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

13,000 VOLUNTEERS FOR AOC'S HOMEWORK-HELP PROGRAM

More than 13,000 people have volunteered for an online-tutoring program that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez sponsored to help pupils in her Bronx-Queens district. The recently re-elected House member decided to expand a pilot "Homework Helpers" program begun in October, after city public schools went back to online-only classes in November. "Many parents were expressing huge struggles with remote online learning, with the difficulty of being able to access the courses," aide Jonathan Soto, who is running the program, told the *Independent News Hour* Dec. 15. Tutors go through training and a background check before being matched with individual students for four one-hour sessions in a "Zoom room" on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons. "The tutoring really makes it easier for the kids," Bronx mother Stacey Bustamante told WCBSTV. "It's a one-on-one situation where they can ask direct questions, where, when you're online for classes, the child is muted."

MTA PULLS THE BRAKE ON 'DOOMSDAY BUDGET'

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has delayed voting on a proposed "doomsday budget" that would raise fares, cut service by 40 percent, and lay off more than 9,000 bus and train workers. Instead, the authority's board on Dec. 16 approved a budget that assumes it will get \$4.5 billion in federal aid in 2021. But MTA chair Patrick J. Foye said during the meeting that if it didn't receive that money by the end of January, it would have to take "severe actions to balance the budget." The "doomsday budget," proposed in November, would have hit bus workers hardest. "This is a significant relief for transit workers, transit riders, and indeed, all other public-sector workers," John Ferretti of the Transport Workers Union Local 100 Fightback Coalition told *LaborPress*. "But we know the fight is far from over ... taxing the rich remains an absolute necessity."

Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

COPS, DRIVER HIT IMMIGRATION PROTESTS IN NJ, NY

Six people were injured in Manhattan Dec. 12 when a car turning a corner rammed into demonstrators supporting a hunger strike by immigrants detained at the Bergen County Jail in Hackensack, N.J. The driver was charged with reckless endangerment. The next day, nine people were arrested in a protest outside the jail, in a confrontation that began when police told a woman taking pictures to get off the sidewalk and ended with them pepper-spraying demonstrators, Brian Garita of Mexicanos Unidos told the *Independent News Hour*. The detainees went on hunger strike last month, he said, because they were denied medication, not told of their COVID-19 test results and "forced to drink toilet water because of lack of access to clean water." The Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement pays the Bergen, Essex and Hudson county jails \$110 to \$120 a day per detainee, and sends others to the Elizabeth Detention Center, run by the for-profit company CoreCivic.

NY STATE PENSION FUND VOWS TO RETIRE FOSSIL FUEL INVESTMENTS

The pension fund covering more than 1 million New York State employees has begun rearranging its investments in order to reach "net zero greenhouse-gas emissions" by 2040, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli announced Dec. 9. The state Common Retirement Fund, the third largest in the United States with an estimated value of \$226 billion, has already divested from 22 coal companies. It plans to evaluate within four years whether other fossil-fuel businesses, such as oil-sands extraction and oil and gas storage and transportation, "are on viable low-carbon transition pathways." If not, the fund would divest "where consistent with fiduciary duty." "Investing for the low-carbon future is essential to protect the fund's long-term value," DiNapoli said in a statement.

ISAMNO



COURTESY

NYPD ABUSES MOUNT

FOLLOWING THIS SPRING'S UPSURGE IN BLACK LIVES MATTERS PROTESTS, POLICE DEPARTMENT MOVES TO CRUSH ALL SIGNS OF DISSENT

BY AMBA GUERGUERIAN & JOHN TARLETON

On the evening of September 17, a group of 60 immigrant rights protesters left Foley Square in lower Manhattan heading toward the 9/11 Memorial. They were trailed closely by 50-60 police officers including 11 white shirts — lieutenants, captains and inspectors — who were ready to rumble.

When the protesters turned onto Broadway, they were chased down and tackled in the street by the police within 10 minutes of having set out. Shortly after, protesters were kettled in front of the 9/11 memorial, where additional police units showed up: 50 additional riot cops, bike cops, plain-clothed officers, detectives and a helicopter.

Tameer Peak, a Black Lives Matter organizer, was filming live on Instagram when the cops pulled him from the sidewalk into the street. He soon found himself face down on Broadway with a half dozen police officers piling on top of him as they put him under arrest.

“They kept trying to rip my fucking arm off,” Peak recalled. “One put his fucking foot in my back. It’s ridiculous to even think that you can’t walk on the sidewalk and record them.”

...

FOLLOWING THE VIDEOTAPED MURDER OF George Floyd by Minneapolis police in late May, massive Black Lives Matter protests erupted across New York City. They continued on a near daily basis over the next month. The NYPD was frequently overwhelmed and, like many other embattled police departments across the country, responded to protests against police violence with more violence — shoving peaceful protesters to the ground, clubbing them with batons, driving police SUVs into crowds, kettling protesters and then arresting them en masse even when they tried to comply with police orders.

Here in New York, large Black Lives Matter protests subsided by the end of June. At about the same time City Council approved an annual budget that pretended to cut \$1 billion from the annual police budget while doing no such thing. The media spotlight moved on.

Since then, protests for racial justice and other progressive causes have still been taking place in the City, usually multiple days of every week. But they are much smaller, averaging 50-200 participants, and present little to no threat to public safety. Yet, over the past four months, an *Independent* investigation has found that on at least 18 occasions peaceful protesters have been violently attacked and/or arrested by police (See sidebar). These crackdowns receive fleeting coverage at most and are invariably treated as one-off incidents — not as a part of an ongoing pattern of police repression.

GRABBED: Black Lives Matter organizer Tameer Peak endures another NYPD arrest at an Oct. 13 protest.

BLUE WALL: A phalanx of cops await their orders

These smaller protests are valuable for movements because they help build confidence and cohesion within and between groups and help prepare the soil from which larger protests and widespread grassroots organizing will spring in the future. When they are violently driven from the streets and participants are deterred from joining in future protests, the whole point of having a First Amendment right to protest is short-circuited.

...

WHILE THE SEPTEMBER 17 INCIDENT is emblematic of the violence the NYPD has directed at protesters, they have other ways to intimidate and disrupt. On a number of occasions, an overwhelming number of cops have shown up at even the smallest of protests and made them look more like crime scenes than the sight of First Amendment-protected dissent.

“This is the new status quo,” a NYPD community affairs officer told *The Independent* when 25 cops including a white-shirted commander engulfed a peaceful Nov. 13 sidewalk protest by 20 32BJ SEIU union members outside the downtown Brooklyn office of City Councilmember Stephen Levin.

The protesters, who are security workers at privately-run homeless shelters, were demanding that

WHEN NOTED AT ALL, THE NYPD'S VIOLENT ACTIONS ARE TREATED AS ONE-OFF INCIDENTS.

Levin co-sponsor bills that would bring their wages and benefits into line with what security workers receive who are under direct contract with the City.

...

A 2007 PARADE ORDINANCE enacted in response to the Critical Mass bicycle protests makes it illegal for protesters to march in the street without a permit. But kettling protesters, telling them to clear the roadway but not giving them a chance to leave before arresting them, and using excessive force to make arrests is also illegal.

“If you’ve already been kettled, the legality of your arrest is in question. If you can’t actually leave, then you’re not ‘free to leave.’ There is a problem once people aren’t free to leave,” explains Gideon Oliver, a lawyer who has been defending protesters’ First Amendment rights in New York City since the 2004 RNC protests.

Continued on page 6



KENNETH LOPEZ

THIS IS HOW YOU STYMIE A MOVEMENT

By AMBA GUERGUERIAN

There were countless instances of police brutality against protesters catalogued during the month of June, when mass protests erupted in NYC and around the country and world in reaction to the murder of George Floyd. Here is a chronicle of unnecessary police force or police presence which has continued through the summer and fall as the NYPD tries to thwart any resurgence of a movement that seeks to defund and ultimately abolish policing as we know it.

The online version of this article at indpendent.org has hyperlinks to video footage of the incidents described here.



7/11/20 — Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, Blue Lives Matter Protest: Cop tases a BLM counter-protester for yelling at him.

7/22/20 — City Hall Park, Manhattan, Occupy City Hall/Abolition Park: Est. 700 officers storm and raid the City Hall Park occupation without warning. They destroy food, clothing, and other resources. The population of occupiers included children and the elderly.

7/26/20 — City Hall Park, Manhattan, protest against Occupy raid: Cops drive NYPD car into a crowd, beat and arrest a group of protesters, resulting in a broken arm and a skull injury.

7/28/20 — 2nd Ave/E. 25th St, Manhattan, 24-Hour BLM protest: Plainclothes cops grab Nikki Stone, a young trans woman wanted for spray painting over police cameras at the City Hall occupation, off her skateboard without warning and throw her in an unmarked van.

9/3/20 — Times Square, Manhattan, Daniel Prude/Dion Kay BLM protest: Cops escort MAGA counter-protesters into a car that proceeds to drive into the group of protesters as the march sets off.



9/13/20 — 34th Precinct/Broadway and 183rd St, Manhattan: Bronx march and Jersey March meet up at GW bridge and stop to protest in front of the 34th precinct, where the NYPD reacts with excessive force, throwing one man to the ground, effectively breaking his arm.

ANTI-ICE PROTESTS: Immigration advocates and BLM activists protest after news hit that women were being sterilized in an ICE detention center in Georgia. NYPD rapidly kettle these protests.

- 9/17/20 — 9/11 memorial/Greenwich St. and Fulton St., Manhattan: Protesters are heavily outnumbered (30 to an est. 150 at one point) and violently kettled. Tackling arrests are made even once protesters move to the sidewalk, as instructed to do by NYPD.
- 9/18/20 — Washington Square Park, Manhattan: Protesters are chased and kettled into Washington Square Park, where some are arrested.
- 9/19/20 — Times Square, Manhattan: Protesters are kettled and arrested in Times Square by a large number of police before beginning to protest in the roadway, 87 arrests are made. Then cops attack holding a



jail support vigil.

9/26/20 — 6th precinct/W 10th St. and Hudson: Protesters were in front of 6th precinct to collect confiscated sound equipment at an earlier "Celebration of Art of Protest." Cops abruptly attack and arrest the protesters after one person steps off the curb. The police knock over outdoor dining tables and chairs in front of stunned customers.

10/13/20 — Trump Tower/5th Ave. and 57th St., Manhattan, pro-Trump protest: At the unveiling of the world's largest known Trump flag, a BLM counter-protester is beaten up by Trump supporters. The NYPD joins in and arrests him.

10/25/20 — Times Square, Manhattan: Altercation between pro-Trump caravan and counter-protesters begins, Police have MAGA leave, then arrest counter-protesters.

10/27/20 — Boerum Pl. and Brooklyn Bridge Blvd., Brooklyn, protest killing of Walter Wallace by Philadelphia police: Some BLM protesters loot corporate businesses in Downtown Brooklyn, then police kettle the whole group of protesters, arresting people who attempt to exit the protest or get onto the sidewalk.

10/29/20 — Downtown Brooklyn — Cops kettle and arrest protesters immediately after making dispersal orders, including a legal observer.

ELECTION WEEK: NYPD uses excessive force and kettling to make arbitrary arrests of non-violent protesters.

- 11/4/20 — Washington Square Park, Manhattan: Massive showing of police, violent



arrests are made, many protesters are arrested on the sidewalk. One protester goes unconscious after 10 cops seize her.

- 11/5/20 — Stonewall Monument, 7th Ave. and Christopher St., Manhattan: At the weekly Black Trans March organized in conjunction with election protests, an est. 100 officers attack the non-violent marchers, brutally arresting a lead organizer.

11/19/20 — Washington Square Park, Manhattan, LGBTQ+ Asylum Seekers March: An NYPD scooter hit-and-runs a protester who leaves the scene in an ambulance.

12/11/20 — 26 Court St., Brooklyn, Eviction Defense Protest: The NYPD violently kettles protesters on the sidewalk in front of an eviction lawyer's office, shoving, punching and arresting them. Protesters who had entered the building and tried to leave after 15 minutes were also kettled without warning and arrested. One arrestee was an 80-year-old tenant organizer who was put in an NYPD van with no open windows and not permitted bathroom breaks or water once in the precinct.

Excessive police presence and intimidation, but no physical violence:



ILLUSTRATIONS BY LEIA DORAN

8/16/20 — Prospect Park, Brooklyn, All-day housing protest: 9 arrest vans intimidate and follow housing activists into Prospect Park where they are having free dinner, shows, and teach-ins.

10/6/20 — Maspeth, Queens, Anti-cop union protest: 30+ NYPD vans and SUVs, SRG (bike) cops, and unmarked cops cars follow an est. 100 protesters.

11/13/20 — Atlantic Ave. and Bond St., 32BJ SEIU Workers' demonstration: 24 cops, a white shirt, and four arrest vans present at a rally of about 20 SEIU sidewalk protesters who had called ahead to see if they needed a permit.

11/10/20 — South Ferry Station/Whitehall St. and South St., Manhattan: A march starting from South Ferry Station was cancelled due to heavy police presence. At one point there are 80+ officers for a group of 20 protesters.

11/17/20 — Barclays Center/Atlantic Ave. and 4th Ave., Brooklyn, People's Liberation March: Heavy police presence, 60 + cops and 10 arrest vans follow a group of about 150 protesters who are surrounded several times.



KENNETH LOPEZ

NYPD ABUSES

Continued from page 4

There is also a rule, CPL §150.20, enacted in January, that mandates police issue summonses and desk appearance tickets at or near the site of the offense, not by bringing the offender to a precinct. The NYPD insists that the chaotic nature of protests necessitates a temporary detention before they issue the summons appearance tickets.

“The Police Department takes protest arrestees through this large-scale arrest process that only happens for protesters,” Oliver said. “We’ve sued them over the years arguing that adding this extra time in custody, prosecutions, etc. are all taxes on First Amendment activities, the purpose of which is to really scare people away from doing it again. Which it frequently does.”

Protesters are also being surveilled, particularly those who identify as abolitionists. “They target us. It’s definitely a pin-point to have the FBI come to my house,” said Peak. “I was at Washington Square Park one day and an officer came up to me and called me by full name. Why are you so giddy that you know my name? That’s scary.”

In June, an anti-police brutality protest in Mott Haven, Bronx was strategically kettled. The Human Rights Watch wrote a report titled “New York Police Planned Assault on Bronx Protesters.” FTP/Decolonize This Place, the organizers, have been some of the most outspoken critics of the NYPD since before the current incarnation of the Black Lives Matter movement.

In 2019, they organized turnstile hopping protests at MTA stations after Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced he would hire 500 new subway cops in a crack-down on fare evasion.

“What happened in Mott Haven is an example of preemptive policing,” Oliver told *The Independent*. “The police department really seems to have chosen the kettling and other violent tactics used based on the message and based on the organizers. Based on their perceptions about the participants. Not based on a real public safety threat or other factors that might justify more heavy-handed police response.”

“Policing,” Oliver observed, “is more violent, more heavy-handed, more repressive when it comes to groups that say ‘fuck the police’ or have abolitionist messages.”

Mayor de Blasio and Police Commissioner Dermot Shea defended the show of force in Mott Haven by alleging that a firearm was discovered in relation to the protest. According to Jennvine Wong, a lawyer with the Legal Aid Society who is defending protesters in *Payne et al. v de Blasio*, a case that sues the City for its handling of the George Floyd protests, the gun was not related to the march. “It sounds like a cover-up,” she told *The Indy*. “And from my understanding, it came out later on that that gun was actually recovered hours before and not even near the march.”

• • •

SO WHY IS THE NYPD able to get away with such an overbearing response? Alex Vitale, Brooklyn College sociology professor and author of *The End of Policing*, says Mayor de Blasio has decided the defund the police movement doesn’t merit being taken seriously.

“Instead of involving them in a legitimate political process, he’s turned the problem over to the police,” Vitale said.

Three of the city’s five police unions endorsed Donald Trump’s re-election while more than 70 percent of New Yorkers voted to cancel Trump’s presidency. Given that and how the police respond to those who question their authority, it’s not unreasonable to think of the NYPD as a highly armed group of counter-protesters.

“They feel like we hate them specifically on an individual level when that’s not the case, we just hate what they represent,” said Peak, who was the housing coordinator at Abolition Park, a nearly month-long protest encampment on the sidewalk outside City Hall this summer that drew hundreds of participants.

Not all protesters have been treated badly by the NYPD. Over the summer and fall, there have been various Back the Blue and pro-Trump protests, all of which have been attended by Black Lives Matter counter-protesters.

During one instance at Times Square on October 25, the NYPD urged members of a pro-Trump caravan to leave the premises after a scuffle broke out and then proceeded to arrest their leftist counterparts.

On October 13, Peak was beaten up by a group of pro-Trump protesters who had just unveiled the world’s largest known Trump flag. When he started to defend himself, the NYPD intervened only to arrest him. He was held in jail for 26 hours before being without a charge.

“Have you ever spent time in central booking for 26 hours? Peak asked. “If you’re not strong minded, then it can break you. So people don’t want to deal with that. And people are afraid of ending up in Rikers.”

Following the presidential election, the NYPD carried out mass arrests of protesters demanding all votes be counted in key swing states. The first incident occurs at Washington Square Park on November 4 and the second on November 5 outside the Stonewall Inn. For many, it wasn’t their first arrest. Since the winding down of the mass marches in early July, many demonstrations have been frequented by the same core group of protesters. Being body slammed to the pavement or barely escaping the grasp of a cop gets old after a while.

“The suppression tactics have been working,” said Peak, who also noted the economic hardship imposed by the federal government’s stingy response to the economic crisis is sapping the movement’s energy.

“People are trying to look for jobs and go back to work,” he said.

• • •

WHILE THE NYPD’S WAR ON PROTEST may be new to younger activists, it’s been a recurring feature of the department throughout its history — from crackdowns on 19th century labor strikes to movements of the unemployed during the Great Depression and again with the rise of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords in the late 1960s. In more recent times, the NYPD’s heavy-handed treatment of protesters can be traced back to the militarization of the department that took place after 9/11, says Jennvine Wong, lead attorney for the Cop Accountability Project of the Legal Aid Society.

The impact of that militarization would become evident in the following years when the NYPD mustered overwhelming force to suppress protests against the 2002 World Economic Forum and the 2004 Republican National Convention as well as Critical Mass, an anarchist-led initiative to make bicycling safer and more popular for New Yorkers at a time

when there were no bike lanes or Citi Bikes.

During the week of RNC protests, more than 1,800 people were arrested and held in pens at a contaminated MTA bus depot including bystanders who were kettled and swept away with everyone else. The city ended up paying out millions of dollars in legal settlements to hundreds of people whose rights were violated.

Critical Mass — an unpermitted, monthly Friday evening bike ride — drew first hundreds and then thousands of participants during the runup to the RNC. Payback from the NYPD came in the form of beatings, arrests and stolen bicycles. Over the next few years, Critical Mass shrank back down to a few dozen participants who were nimble enough to be able to escape from the cops.

During the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011, New York City saw a similarly brutal police response. An investigation led by NYU, Fordham, Harvard and Stanford concluded that the NYPD violated OWS protesters on numerous occasions. When then Mayor Michael Bloomberg called the NYPD “my own army” that fall, he wasn’t kidding.

It was under de Blasio and his first Police Commissioner William Bratton that the NYPD “army” developed a specialized battalion of 800 cops tasked with the dual mission of responding to terrorist attacks and handling protests.

“It’s an interesting combination of job functions for that particular group,” Wong said. “They’ve been particularly problematic because we’ve seen them in video after video in their fancy suits and their mountain bikes being really aggressive. You have to wonder why that is. Because what is their training really focused on?”

The overall level of resources the NYPD can deploy is formidable — 36,000 officers and 19,000 civilian employees working with a \$6 billion annual budget.

In 2021, New Yorkers will elect a new mayor and City Council. A number of organizers who marched for black lives in June are now running for City Council seats in their communities. If there is a sizable leftwing contingent in the next Council, it could move to slash the NYPD’s budget and redirect funds to social services that address the causes of crime. However, it’s the mayor who has the sole power to appoint the police commissioner, who in turn runs the department on a day-to-day basis. So far, the leading mayoral contenders have shown little interest in imposing deep, structural changes on the police department.

For Alex Vitale, now is the time in New York for a surge of community organizing and base building around alternatives to policing that had already been done before the George Floyd protests in places such as Minneapolis, Austin, Los Angeles and Portland, laying the groundwork for big victories that followed.

“Street protest is not enough,” Vitale said. “Hopefully what we will see in the next six months is a kind of increase in that base-building, people talking to their neighbors and family members and friends about what these alternatives to policing would look like, the ways they would make communities safer than they are today and then that sets us up for a very different kind of politics where elected officials are getting pressure from their base for less policing.”



GARY MARTIN

PROGRESSIVES PUNK POLICE UNIONS

BY ROMAN BROSKOWSKI

As New York moves to certify its election results, the narrative that Democrats' bail reform package cost them suburban seats has been inverted.

While Republicans initially declared victory after leading many key legislative races on and after election night, Democrats will actually add a State Senate supermajority to their existing one in the Assembly.

Just a few weeks ago, such a result seemed utterly out of reach. Democrats faced well-funded challenges by Republicans in several suburban districts, while the state's powerful police unions — as well as Gov. Andrew Cuomo's longtime ally and millionaire Ron Lauder — aimed to make the election a referendum on the state's recent bail reform legislation.

The 2019 package, which severely restricted cash bail and sought to reduce pretrial detention for most offenses, has been controversial since becoming law. Soon after going into effect in 2020, the reform bill was altered as a result of a concerted backlash by police unions, Republicans and prosecutors, according to Katie Schaffer, director of advocacy for the New York-based Center for Community Alternatives.

"There was a highly coordinated racist fear-mongering campaign led by police unions and prosecutors and taken full political advantage of by Republicans around the state," Schaffer said. "[And] the Democratic majority in the legislature allowed the rolling back of bail reform ... and they did it explicitly for political reasons [because] they were nervous about the backlash from police and prosecutors."

Hoping to capitalize on that backlash, Republicans argued bail reform had led to rising crime and a state in disarray.

"Despite [the law's alterations] ... opposition to bail reform was the primary thing that many of the Republicans around the state ran on during the 2020 elections," Schaffer added. "And [they] lost substantially."

After spending millions of dollars, Republicans still only managed to flip two seats and defend one of the six senate battleground districts they targeted. Meanwhile, Democrats were able to win several open

races for a net gain of three seats. Their two-thirds supermajorities give them the ability to pass legislation over Gov. Cuomo's veto, though it's unclear how willing they will be to clash with a three-term governor from their own party.

For criminal justice advocates like Schaffer, these results prove that progressive stances on criminal justice are not radioactive.

"There has been in New York state a move in a more progressive direction," they said. "And that includes in some somewhat more conservative districts."

Schaffer also argues that this year's election victory also solidifies previous progressive gains while paving the way for more extensive future pushes.

"We and other [advocates] will continue to push for decarceration," they said. "I think the reality of this election is that it has made clear that bail reform was not, in fact, a political liability, and that sort of greatly reduces the chance of a future threat to it."

Additionally, some elected officials see a validation of their grassroots organizing politics in the results.

"[Winning a supermajority] is an incredible testament to the work that progressives have done," Democratic State Senator Jessica Ramos told the *Independent News Hour*, the weekly radio show of this publication. "I'm very happy that we are able to prove that with our progressive politics, with a politics that cares about human beings ... [we have] a winning strategy."

Now with full control of the legislature, New York Democrats are floating proposals for several progressive policies, including higher taxes on the rich, rent forgiveness and cannabis legalization.

"Now that we're battle-tested, we need to push," said State Senator Ramos.

However, with the party divided between an insurgent left and more moderate leadership, it remains unclear what form much of this legislation will take.

"We have an exact supermajority ... you know what Cuomo is thinking, he's going to try and pick off one or two of the usual suspects," said Ramos. "We have to be strategic."

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with Amy Goodman
and Juan González

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REVEREND BILLY RADIO



SUE BRISK

SHE'S GOT MOU- MENTUM

BERNIE ORGANIZER GAINS SUPPORT IN QUEENS SPECIAL ELECTION

BY JOHN TARLETON

In 2016, Moumita Ahmed was a millennial pied piper managing Facebook pages full of iconic memes that drew hundreds of thousands of young voters to Bernie Sanders.

In 2018, she was the social media director for the Justice Democrats during Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's successful primary run against 10-term congressman Joe Crowley that rocked the Queens Democratic Party machine.

More recently Ahmed has been focused on bringing Sanders' "political revolution" to her corner of southeastern Queens. She founded Bangladeshi Americans for Political Progress (BAPP), a first-ever political club in New York City for progressive Bangladeshis. This past year she orchestrated a campaign that elected a dozen young reformers to district leader positions across Queens, another step forward in the struggle to dismantle the party machine and make local government responsive to voters. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, she launched the Queens Mutual Aid Network to deliver groceries and medicine to homebound neighbors in Jamaica, Queens.

Now, with a Feb. 2 special election fast approaching to fill the vacant seat for City Council District 24 in Queens, Ahmed, 30, is running hard to be the first in a wave of leftwing candidates elected to the City Council in 2021, a year that will see more than half of the Council's 51 seats come open due to term limits.

The District 24 special election will be a test run for ranked-choice voting, which New York City will use this year for the first time in its party primaries, though not in the November general election.

"I have the opportunity to establish the tone of the races in 2021," says Ahmed, a democratic socialist. "If I win, then everybody will have to realize that being progressive and having convictions is important to winning the hearts and minds of working-class people."

Ahmed immigrated to the United States from Bangladesh with her parents when she was 8 years old. Twenty-two years later, she still lives in the same corner of Jamaica where she has made her mark as a rising community leader. She cites her grandfather, who was martyred during the Bangladeshi independence struggle of the early 1970s, as the inspiration for her serve-the-people approach to activism.

"I always grew up with this idea of taking care of another, to help people in need: to risk, to sacrifice, to support one another," Ahmed told *The Independent*. "So if my grandfather could give up his life for his neighbor, how can I not fight for my people?"

When Ahmed became ill with COVID-19 this spring and found herself recuperating at home for two months and drained of her usual dynamism, she had an epiphany.

"It was just so profound to have something like that and not know if there's going to be a next day, but also not being able to do any organizing work and the thing that you love," she said. "That's when I realized that organizing is my life. I can't live without it."

• • •

IN NEW YORK CITY, Bangladeshis can be found driving cabs, working

COMMITTED: City Council candidate Moumita Ahmed speaks at a rally in Jamaica, Queens.

MOUMITA AHMED

at fruit stands, handing you your cup of coffee at the neighborhood deli. Ahmed would be the first member of her community to serve on the City Council and the first Southeast Asian to do so as well.

District 24 was previously represented by Rory Lancman, who took a job in the Cuomo administration this fall. To win, Ahmed will have to stitch together a multiracial coalition in a district that spans

Kew Gardens Hills, Pomontok, Electchester, Fresh Meadows, Hillcrest, Jamaica Estates, Briarwood, Parkway Village, Jamaica and Jamaica Estates and encompasses both well-to-do homeowner enclaves and working-class immigrant communities like her own.

Former City Councilmember James Gennaro is the presumptive frontrunner in a field of seven candidates. Gennaro served three terms from 2002 to 2013, before joining Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration as a deputy commissioner in the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Special elections tend to be low-turnout affairs dominated by older voters who are more likely to come out to vote. This will likely favor Gennaro, as many older voters in the district will have already voted for him before. However, Ahmed insists the electorate in her district has changed dramatically since Gennaro last ran for office in 2009 and that her campaign can reach those new voters just as Ocasio-Cortez did in her run against Crowley.

"Just because Jim Gennaro ran for City Council 10 or 15 years ago doesn't mean he can win now," Ahmed says. "We have a huge chance. The district has changed. This is the future. This is AOC and Bernie's political revolution. This is the edge of the ripple effect."

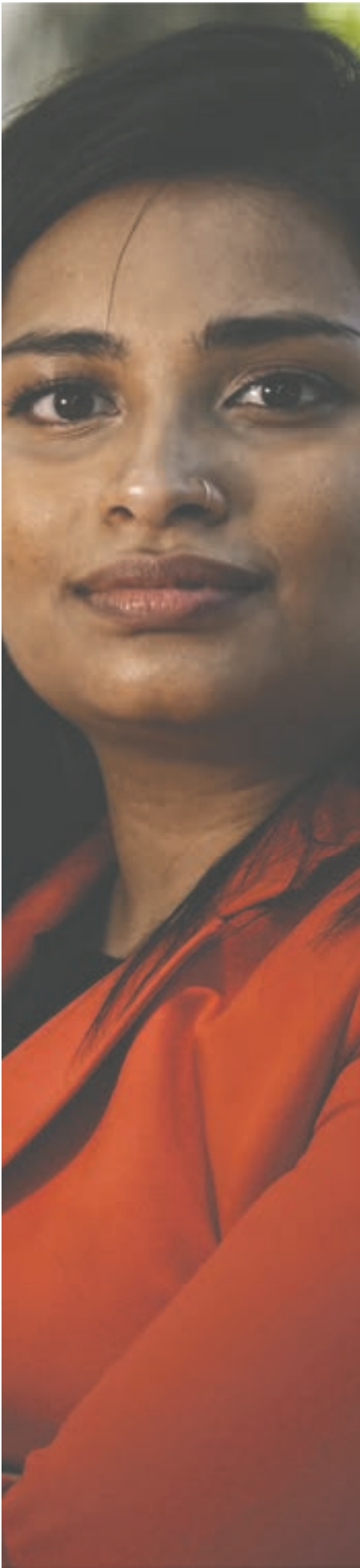
One sign of the generational dynamics at work can be found online, where, as *The Independent* goes to press, the Gennaro campaign's twitter page (@ElectJimGennaro) has four followers, while Ahmed (@disruptionary) has more than 13,000 followers and saw a recent campaign video quickly gain more than 60,000 views.

Another marker in this Boomer v. Millennial contest is that Gennaro is a homeowner in upscale Jamaica Estates (the same neighborhood where Donald Trump grew up), while Ahmed is a renter who calls for "a whole new approach to housing" that jettisons the upzonings of whole neighborhoods and market-rate construction for the rich preferred by Mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio for a model that relies on nonprofit developers and community land trusts to create housing for the working class. Ahmed is also calling for defunding the police and reinvesting the money in community services and for relief for small businesses battered by the pandemic.

Ahmed has been endorsed by progressive luminaries Ro Khanna, Zephyr Teachout and Cynthia Nixon, local elected officials — State Senator Julia Salazar, Assemblyman Ron Kim, City Councilmember Jimmy Van Bramer — and a number of civic groups including the Asian American Chamber of Commerce, the Muslim Entrepreneur Association, the Hispanic American Voters Association and Sister Diaspora for Liberation.

"We have to change the culture of organizing and of politics. Right now capitalism has the hegemony over mainstream politics, our institutions, our way of life," Ahmed says. "There's a pandemic and people are losing faith in the current system and so this is an opportunity for people like me who believe in compassion, believe in human rights to remind folks that there is hope."

For our full interview with Moumita Ahmed, see indypendent.org.



SUE BRISK



SUE BRISK

KINGSBROOK HOSPITAL GETS A REPRIEVE

By AMBA GUERGUERIAN

Despite the growing second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and calls from Mayor Andrew Cuomo to maximize hospital capacity around the state, Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in East Flatbush was slated to close all its hospital beds by December 31, continuing as a collection of ambulatory and outpatient-care clinics.

Then on December 15, at a Zoom town hall meeting with management, Kingsbrook healthcare workers learned that the hospital's closure will be delayed until January 31. Closure evaluation will then ensue on a month-to-month basis.

Located in East Flatbush, Kingsbrook serves a largely Caribbean and Black population. It is a safety net hospital that provides care regardless of a patient's ability to pay. Like many safety net hospitals, it operates at a loss due to low Medicaid reimbursement rates, which makes it a target for budget-cutting politicians.

An average 60 percent of Kingsbrook's hospital beds were being used prior to the pandemic. At the height of the pandemic in New York City, 125% of the hospital's beds were in use. As *The Indypendent* goes to press, the hospital hosts 14 COVID-19 patients. That number will likely climb, as the positivity rate in the city is on the rise and a spike is predicted to follow winter holiday celebrations.

Jo Ann Brown is a registered dietician who has worked at Kingsbrook since 2017. "If Kingsbrook does close after the public health situation stabilizes, then no, nobody has really learned anything," she

ON LIFE SUPPORT: Hospital workers and community members rallied outside Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in East Flatbush on Oct. 26 to protest plans to close all the beds at Kingsbrook by the end of the year.

said, pointing out the necessity of having vacant beds. Before the phased closure began, the hospital had 248 beds that were suited for COVID-19 patients. As of August 13, it had 142. Following management's decision to delay closing Kingsbrook, at least 41 extra beds were reopened.

• • •

THE OFFICIAL DECISION to delay the closure was likely made by the New York State Department of Health, which is the architect of the reorganization and closure of hospitals.

"My hope is that the community and staff pressure had an effect on how the administration is viewing the importance of the hospital," Jo Ann Brown told *The Indy*.

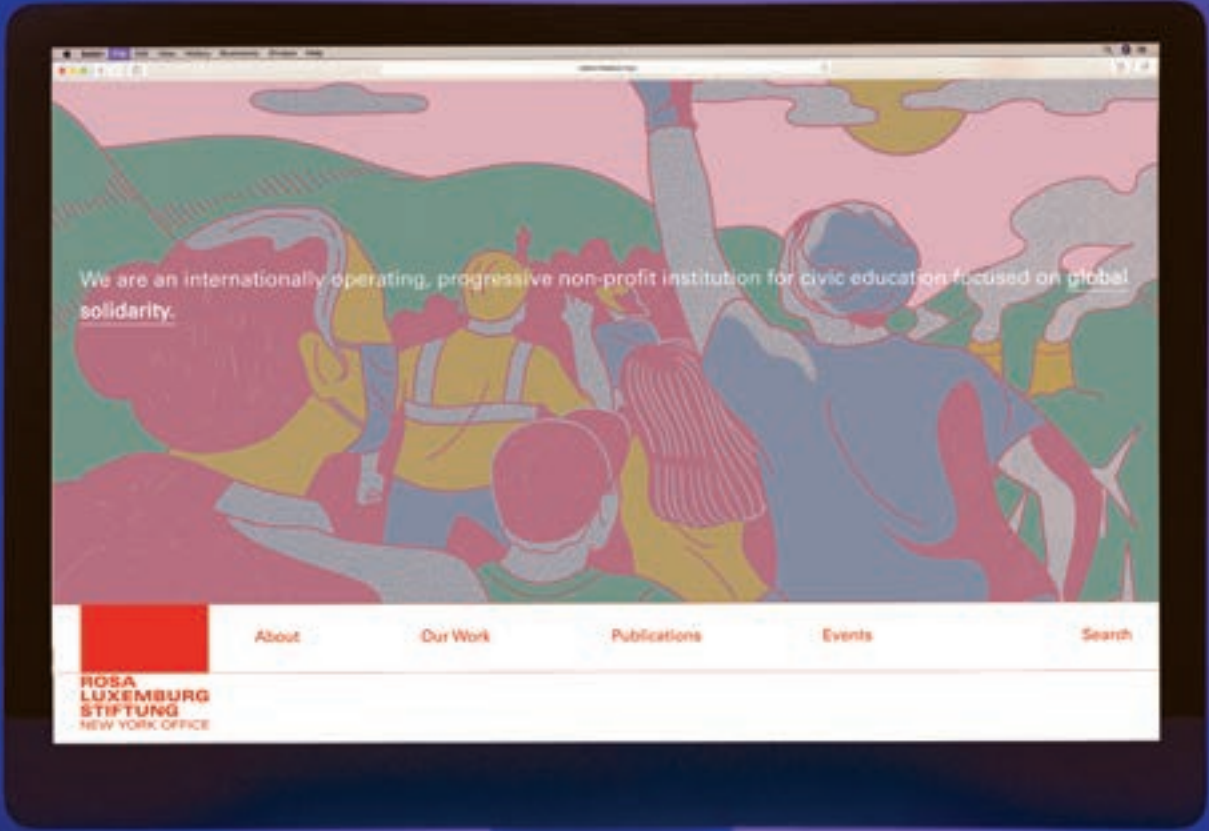
Since August, when they got their bearings back after fighting for PPE during the hardest months of the pandemic, Kingsbrook workers organized and spoke out against the plan. They got local community board members on board, conducted an oral history project, hosted rallies, flyeried in the community and reached out to local media outlets.

"*The Indypendent* did a great job of bringing often ignored grassroots community voices to the fore on this issue," said Julie Keefe, a nurse at Kingsbrook and another one of the leaders of the campaign to keep the hospital open.

With the hospital going month-to-month, its workers are grappling with the uncertainty of not knowing when their lives could be turned upside down and a lack of communication from both management and their union.

"Now I'm pivoting to organizing the staff," Brown said.

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SUE BRISK



BOB OWEN

HURRICANE WARNING

FROM NEW YORK TO CALIFORNIA, MILLIONS OF TENANTS NATIONWIDE FACE A LOOMING WAVE OF EVICTIONS

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

The United States could see a Hurricane Katrina of evictions next month, as the federal Center for Disease Control's limited moratorium on evictions and two programs expanding unemployment benefits are scheduled to expire by Dec. 31.

In late September, the National Council of State Housing Agencies projected that by January 2021, up to 8.4 million renter households containing more than 20 million people could have eviction cases filed against them. It estimated that would include more than 1 million people in California, 860,000 in Texas, and 730,000 in New York.

The crisis has been looming for months as back rent piled up for people who lost jobs or income during the epidemic, but tenant organizers around the country say the breaking point will come if the federal eviction moratorium and the expanded unemployment-benefit programs—a 13-week extension for people who have exhausted the six months of regular benefits, and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, which provides benefits to freelance and gig-economy workers—are not renewed. The CDC's order, which prohibits evicting people who have lost income from pandemic-related causes for nonpayment of rent if they would likely end up homeless, is scheduled to expire Dec. 31.

"Come January, I don't think any locality in Massachusetts will have an eviction moratorium," says Helen Matthews of City Life/Vida Urbana in Boston. "We're facing down a new year with no protections. It's hard to put words to how scary it is."

In April, Massachusetts enacted "one of the strongest eviction moratoriums, because we organized and fought for it," she says, but it expired in October. Since then, she adds, almost 3,000 nonpayment eviction cases have been filed, along with thousands more "no-fault" cases, such as when the tenant's lease has ended and the landlord wants to replace them with someone who can pay much higher rent. (Landlords in Boston and Cambridge could not refuse to renew leases without good cause until 1994, when a state ballot initiative prohibited local rent-control laws.)

City Life/Vida Urbana has had some success organizing tenants to bargain collectively for lower rent, however. In November, when a California real-estate investment firm bought an apartment complex in the Mattapan neighborhood, the newly formed tenant association negotiated a deal that gave all residents five-year leases with rent increases limited to 3-3.25 percent a year.

CALIFORNIA

In California, the COVID-19 Tenant Relief Act, enacted in August, sets complicated rules to protect tenants who can demonstrate COVID-related hardship: If they owe rent from before Aug. 31, they can't be evicted for nonpayment, but can be taken to small-claims court for the debt. They have to pay 25 percent of rent owed since then by Jan. 31, when the law expires, and will have to begin paying the rest by March 1.

The law "seems to have pushed back the tidal wave we still think is on the horizon," says Larry Gross of the Coalition for Economic Survival, a Los Angeles housing-rights organization. But it's so complex that "it even confuses me," he adds.

While 80 percent of apartments in Los Angeles are rent-controlled, he says, the city already had the highest rate of overcrowding and "rent burden" as a percentage of residents' incomes in the nation even before the epidemic hit. And tenants' knowledge of their rights, he laments, is so low that "sometimes all the landlord has to do is file an eviction notice and

people will move." The epidemic has made it much harder to reach people; CES's tenant-rights clinic is now being conducted on Zoom.

"I spend my days from morning until night dealing with tenants who are panicked," Gross says. "It's like someone lit a huge bomb under us, and we're watching the fuse get closer and closer."

In Alameda County, the East Bay jurisdiction that includes Oakland and Berkeley, courts have decided not to process most eviction cases, but there have been more evictions in Contra Costa County to the east, according to the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment.

Eviction "doesn't make sense when we're asking people to stay inside," says ACCE board chair Sasha Graham, who lives in the East Bay city of Albany. Both ACCE and CES are calling for the state to pass a law cancelling rent debt accrued during the pandemic.

"We need to forgive people for not paying the things they cannot pay," says Graham. But the two groups also want that coupled with aid for small landlords, so they don't lose their buildings to foreclosure and being snapped up as "distressed assets" by corporate and private-equity owners like Blackstone and Invitation Homes.

"We could end up with the Wall Street guys coming in and grabbing up properties," says Sandy Rollins of the Dallas-based Texas Tenants Union.

TEXAS

Lone Star State tenants have almost no rights, Rollins says. Rent strikes are illegal, tenants can be held in default if they're even one day late with the rent, and the most commonly used lease form says they can be evicted within 24 hours after a court orders them out.

Eviction cases in Texas dropped dramatically when the state Supreme Court imposed a moratorium last spring, but have since crept back up. In Dallas, the number of eviction cases, only 30 in April, was close to 1,500 by June, says Rollins. According to state court records, 107,000 new landlord-tenant cases had been filed as of Sept. 30, slightly more than half the number filed during the same period in 2019.

Some tenants have been able to fend off eviction using the CDC moratorium, and Dallas and Austin have enacted laws to give tenants more time to respond to an eviction notice and to arrange payment—but "we're seeing all these things come to an end at the end of the year," says Rollins.

The state's Eviction Diversion Program, established in October to offer rental assistance to low-income tenants financially affected by the pandemic, is scheduled to be expanded statewide on Jan. 1, from 19 to 254 counties—but it will expire Feb. 1.

KANSAS CITY

Tenants in Kansas City, Mo., also have minimal rights. Earlier this month, when the tenant union in an apartment building where the landlord had ordered all 68 residents to move out by Jan. 31 demanded free rent for December and January, he responded, "LOL."

Since the city allowed evictions to resume June 1, landlords have filed more than 2,400 eviction cases, and judges have ordered more than 650 tenants thrown out, says Kansas City Tenants director Tara Raghuvier. Many eviction hearings are held as online teleconferences, she adds, and the courts provide no guidance about how tenants are supposed to join if they don't have Internet access or speak a language other than English.

KC Tenants has responded with creative Zoom-bombing. The group says it has delayed more than

365 evictions since July by disrupting teleconference hearings, and in late November, one judge cancelled her entire eviction docket for the rest of the year.

“We are mucking up a process that prioritizes landlords’ profits over tenant lives,” Raghuveer said in an email message. “We are buying critical time for tenants who, like all of us, need to stay home in order to stay alive during the pandemic.”

CHICAGO

In Chicago, more than 1,500 eviction cases had been filed in Cook County courts as of Dec. 4, and will proceed if Gov. J.B. Pritzker does not extend the state’s moratorium when it expires Dec. 12, says Antonio Gutierrez, an organizer with the Autonomous Tenants Union. The group, based in Albany Park, a multiracial but gentrifying neighborhood on the Northwest Side, has seen landlords be aggressive about trying to oust tenants, he says—although the state’s moratorium gave it leverage to help stop the new owner of a seven-apartment building from emptying it.

The ATU had been campaigning to repeal the state’s ban on local rent-control laws and for a law to prohibit evictions without “just cause,” but is now concentrating on “creating the infrastructure for eviction support,” Gutierrez says. That includes connecting tenants with legal services and helping immigrants with income and legal documents.

“We’re preparing for the worst,” he says.

NEW YORK

In New York City, the first known eviction since the beginning of the pandemic took place Nov. 20. Gov. Andrew Cuomo had extended the Tenant Safe Harbor Act, which largely prohibits evicting residential tenants if they can prove they lost income from the pandemic, until Jan. 1, but the state court system’s moratorium on evictions expired Sept. 30.

The city’s five Housing Courts reopened in September and October. In early November, they ended their moratorium on issuing “default judgments,” allowing eviction warrants against tenants who don’t reply to eviction notices or don’t show up to court hearings. The courts, which had been telling tenants who’d received notices that their landlord is trying to evict them not to respond—they normally have to be answered within three days—but to wait until they got a letter from the court, suddenly did an about-face: The state Office of Court Administration sent letters to 40,000 tenants informing them that they now had to answer.

Met Council on Housing chair Kenny Schaeffer, a longtime tenant lawyer, paraphrases those letters’ message as, “You have to answer, and if you can’t access electronic filing and can’t get through to our (overwhelmed) phones, you have to answer in person, and if you don’t, you might be evicted, but if you come in person you might not be able to get in, but if you can’t get in, that won’t be an excuse for not answering, and you might get evicted anyway.”

A staffer on Met Council’s Spanish-language tenant hotline said she’d received a call from a 90-year-old woman in a wheelchair who’d tried to call the court to explain her defenses, but got no answer and the voicemail box was full. She couldn’t respond online or in person because she doesn’t have a computer and can’t walk.

The situation is much worse in Rochester, a city of about

205,000 people where two-thirds of the residents are renters. As of Dec. 4, according to Rochester City-Wide Tenant Union organizer Allison Dentinger, judges had issued 100 eviction warrants, 65 for nonpayment and 35 “holdovers,” generally owners refusing to renew the leases of tenants who complain about lack of repairs.

Evictions are happening quickly and aggressively, she says. On Dec. 8, a tenant reported that a city marshal had climbed into through the window of his home to change the locks after he refused to answer the door. In another case, the landlord changed the locks in a woman’s apartment while she was in the hospital with a heart attack, claiming that she’d “abandoned” the unit.

That’s illegal, Dentinger says, but “it’s sort of the Wild West up here. There’s very little accountability.”

In mid-November, a quickly organized blockade—“we alerted everybody”—stopped city marshals from evicting a single father who’d lost his job in the pandemic. A judge had ruled he wasn’t covered by the CDC moratorium because he’d been on rent strike when the pandemic hit. The landlord had refused to accept government rental-assistance payments.

That was a victory, but “an individual solution to a systemic problem,” Dentinger says. “We need to cancel rent and mortgage payments, house our homeless, and pause all evictions immediately.”

Bills to do all three have been introduced in the New York State Legislature, and Dentinger hopes it makes them a priority when it returns on Jan. 6. Those, along with just-cause evictions and helping small landlords avoid foreclosure, are common threads in tenant groups’ legal and legislative agitation around the nation.

Gutierrez is encouraged by the growth of “organic” tenant networks. The ATU is now part of the Chicago Tenants Movement, a coalition of 15 groups that includes the Chicago Teachers Union. The coronavirus crisis seems to have accelerated the recent development of tenant organizing outside its traditional strongholds in New York, Boston, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles.

In Boston, City Life/Vida Urbana, which did a number of eviction-blockade sit-ins during the foreclosure crisis of 2008-10, is again trying to organize an eviction-defense network. “We are prepared to do direct action and blockading evictions on a mass scale if we have to,” says Helen Matthews.

For Sasha Graham, the basic issue is fairness. “People don’t have any money. It’s just not possible to ask people to pay the last nine months of rent when there was already a housing crisis before the pandemic,” she says. “The money is there. It’s about having the courage to tax people who have the money. It has to be about the collective.”

GOING TO THE

SOURCE: *Crown Heights Tenant Union members march on December 11 from the Brooklyn Housing Court to the law offices of Balsamo, Rosenblatt & Hall, a law firm that specializes in evicting tenants.*

UNHOUSED: *A woman in San Antonio contemplates her future after being evicted from her home.*

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WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET AN EVICTION NOTICE

If your landlord is trying to evict you, they must first send you a written warning that they intend to take you to court. They then serve you court papers saying they want to evict you.

These notices, usually taped to your door or handed to you personally, are more bark than bite. But you must respond to the court papers on time in order to defend yourself. It’s the first step in a process.

There are two types of evictions: nonpayment and holdover. In a nonpayment case, your landlord must first issue a demand that you pay what they say you owe. If you don’t pay within 14 days, they can then start a court case by serving you with papers. You will have to respond within

10 days. The best way is to call the court at the number listed.

You can avoid eviction by paying rent. Many cases are settled by a “stipulation” in which the landlord and tenant agree to a payment schedule, or by tenants getting a “one-shot deal” from public assistance to cover the back rent.

A holdover case is where your landlord wants you out for other reasons, such as noise complaints. In these cases, you do not need to respond until you get papers alerting you of an actual court date.

You can either represent yourself or get a lawyer. Right now, under special COVID rules, any tenant who has an eviction case on the Housing Court calendar can get representation through the city’s Right to Counsel law. For now, the city is waiving the income and neighborhood requirements. Call 311 if you have been

given a court date.

Your landlord does not have the right to force you out, change the locks, or remove your property without a court order. This is a common threat, but it’s illegal.

There are also temporary limits on evictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information, call the Metropolitan Council on Housing’s tenant hotline at (212) 979-0611, or go to Housing Court Answers at housingcourtanswers.org. You can also call Housing Court Answers 212-962-4795.

— STEVEN WISHNIA



WHAT WE LEARNED IN THE TRUMP ERA

WE INVITED PROGRESSIVE ACTIVISTS, ORGANIZERS, JOURNALISTS AND SCHOLARS TO HELP US MAKE SENSE OF THESE PAST FOUR YEARS

BY INDEPENDENT STAFF

When Donald Trump's presidential term ends on January 20th, it will mark the end of one of the most tumultuous eras in American history. One shocking incident (or tweet) followed another. Millions of Americans responded by taking to the streets over and over again. Now that the Trump era is winding down, what have we learned about ourselves and our country that should inform us as we go forward?

NATASHA SANTOS

I was dating a white guy in November 2016 when Trump was elected. It was one of those needlessly tumultuous relationships wherein the people don't fully understand why it's so hard and why they're trying. We'd been dating since August and had known each other since June, when he began subletting a room in the collective house I lived in in Crown Heights. He, like me, was a native Brooklynite. He, like me, had been educated mostly in NYC public schools. He, like me, believed in intentional community and collective living. Unlike me, however, he could go to his parents' upstate country cottage when Brooklyn became too "overwhelming."

The morning after Trump was elected I threw up something white and frothy in the sink; some strange mixture of mucus and panic. I called my white boyfriend at his country house that afternoon to tell him how I was feeling and seek comfort he'd never shown the ability or desire to provide.

"It'll be fine," he said matter-of-factly.

"That's easy for you to say. You're a rich, white male!" I exclaimed. "I'm not."

"Yeah," he continued, sort of ignoring my outburst. "There's no way they're going to let him do all the crazy stuff he talked about."

The certainty in his voice kind of made me doubt my misgivings. I mean, how different really could his reality be from my own?

We hung up soon after that, then broke up in the early

months of Trump's presidency, then stopped speaking to each other a few months after that.

This June, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement and its demands for accountability and acknowledgement, I reached out to him. He said that he'd pretty much vacated his Brooklyn house and lived mainly in his upstate abode.

"It's crazy down there! COVID and now the protests! Things are getting worse."

When I brought up our original conversation about Trump's election, he said that he'd been "thinking a lot about it lately."

"Who could have foreseen things getting this bad?" He quipped.

"I did," I said flatly. "So, I'm out there protesting so things don't get worse. It's hard."

"You don't have to," he offered. "You can come up here and not deal with it at all." And with that, I realized, we'd always lived in different realities.

Natasha Santos is a native Brooklynite with almost 20 years of child welfare advocacy, writing and organizing experience. These days you can find her hosting forums and attending classes on Zoom, in the streets declaring that Black Lives Matter and going for bike rides around her Brooklyn neighborhood.

KAZEMBE BALAGUN

Following the police murder of George Floyd, an estimated 10-25 million people took part in Black Matter Lives protests across the country and around the world. The largely multiracial but Black-led protests were the largest civil rights demonstrations in U.S. history. In that mix, was a number of Black-led wildcat strikes and rent strikes.

After Donald Trump's 2016 victory, many on the left saw the Black Lives Matter Movement as an example of "identity politics" that alienated the white working class. But Trump's racist dog whistling and the rapid growth of white supremacist networks under his watch made a resurgence of #BlackLivesMatter a necessity.

As Trump leaves office, we can see there are really two #BlackLivesMatter. There is the universal hashtag, that is a

sign of solidarity, and used by celebrities and influencers to draw attention to the oppression of Black people. On the other hand is a growing Black left, one that roots Black oppression within a critique of capitalism. Recently elected Squad members Cori Bush, Jamaal Bowman, and Ilhan Omar represent this wing, as well as sections of the Democratic Socialists of America and the Working Families Party. Additionally, there is an influential wing of #ADOS, American Descendants of Slaves, which is seeking to create a third way between patriotism and a demand for reparations.

These factions cross over, conflict and at times coalesce with each other. Now with Biden heading to the White House, there is a necessity for a radical Black left to emerge to challenge the center. This radical Black left must produce what Michael Dawson called "Black counterpublics" rooted in protest politics and grassroots democratic culture. This is particularly true with the shockwaves of gentrification and economic depression threatening the existential and political standing of the Black community.

Kazembe Balagun is a cultural historian and writer living in the Bronx. He works for the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung New York Office.

JUANA PONCE DE LEON

Four years of Trump have exposed the fault lines of inequality, including in both independent and legacy media. For years there has been an outcry by Latino journalists that they, who are intimately familiar with their communities' issues, are not called upon to provide information and perspectives, frequently not captured by English-language media. Hence the unexpected surprise for many when the Latinx voter preferences in the recent election revealed a more nuanced reality underlying the one-size-fits-all Latinx appellation.

Had Latino journalists been consulted or assigned to cover the elections, engagement of their communities would have been more granular and the egregious opacity in our comprehension of what diversity looks like in U.S. society would hopefully be diminished. To not avail ourselves of these journalists' expertise is to negate/obliterate the vast cultural differences among Latino communities whose political legacies shape their social and political engagement. This is akin to trying to navigate a terrain where vast segments of the map remain blank. This willful negligence, this lack of inclusivity, is irresponsible to us all.

Juana Ponce de León's many years in publishing, the nonprofit arena and government have been dedicated to ensuring a cultural conversation inclusive of the myriad voices representing the diversity of American society. She is former Director of Media Diversity Relations for City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, Former Executive Editor of New York Community Media Alliance, and is currently heading the communications group for Queens Borough President Donovan Richards' transition team.

GERALD MEYER

As Trump's presidency comes to an end, what stands out is the degree that we have been reorganized tribally. The topsy-turvy distribution of class and party affiliation upends basic Marxist principles. Gender, education level, degree of religiosity are among the most decisive factors in determining people's political behavior. The considerable degree of activism is encouraging. The degree to which the Republicans know that they can't win a fair election is evident and not likely to change. Therefore they will continue to go down an extreme right-wing path. These circumstances make it imperative that we build a broad front that cuts across ideological lines.

Gerald Meyer is a professor emeritus of history at Hostos Community College and author of Vito Marcantonio Radical Politician (1902-1954).

ROSS BARKAN

We learned over the last four years that groups of people can't be treated as monoliths and Democrats are fast losing the working class. Spanish-speaking voters in most states and cities, including New York, swung heavily toward Donald Trump, as did Blacks to a lesser degree. Trump's coalition was more diverse than it was in 2016 and Democrats need to think really hard about why that is. Voters without college degrees are increasingly voting alike and they aren't voting Democrat. The Democratic Party is becoming a coalition of educated elites, maintaining its Black and Latino base thanks to a legacy of GOP racism and liberal achievements that are now more than a half century-old.

The goal of the Democratic Party should be to reverse this slide — calling Trump a racist and fascist isn't good enough. If the next generation of Democrats don't prioritize broad, ambitious, and popular economic programs that can uplift millions out of working class precarity and poverty, they will not have unified control of the federal government for a very long time. If bold economics aren't a part of that messaging, culture wins, and Republicans have been winning the culture war, despite what Twitter thinks. If people don't have trade unions and don't feel like the government is helping them, they can default to whatever it is Republicans tell them. This is the future Democrats face if they don't change course. Conversely, if Republicans get smarter about economics and keep their culture message, Democrats won't wield power again.

Ross Barkan is a writer and journalist from New York City. He is a columnist for Guardian and Jacobin, and the author of Demolition Night, a novel.

EVAN SULT

When Andrew Yang became the first presidential candidate to propose UBI of \$1,000 per month, he was almost universally derided as an idealist pinning his run on an impossible policy goal. Two years later, the CARES Act turned into a real-world experiment in what happens when federal wealth is directly redistributed across the economic spectrum — whether you were formerly making \$30,000 a year or \$300,000 a year, you received \$600 per week, every week. The result? Unequivocal success: the economy averted an immediate meltdown because money kept flowing in a way that would have been impossible otherwise.

In my household, both of us were suddenly unemployed in March. My job eventually returned; hers did not. The \$600/wk in addition to small unemployment amounts was abso-

lutely critical to us paying rent, but it also allowed us to keep spending money in our community. Without that money, we'd have been scraping by at best, and spending the absolute minimum possible. Instead, we were able to let money keep flowing through our lives and through the community. I know this is true for countless numbers of friends whose jobs in entertainment, food, service, and events have been eviscerated. The CARES Act isn't an exact analogue for UBI, but it's close enough for us to learn the basic lesson: spreading money directly into the bottom and middle tiers of the economy is fantastic economic policy. If anything, Yang's revolutionary idea wasn't revolutionary enough!

Without intending to, Congress proved to America what a profoundly positive impact direct payment to citizens can have on our society, on our quality of life, and even on our institutions. They will surely do everything in their power to unlearn this lesson, so it's up to us all to remember how immediately effective those payments were, and to push for a new economic model for our country based on what we learned from the CARES Act.

Evan Sult is a publication designer, printmaker, writer and musician based in Brooklyn. He is currently the art director of the Detroit Metro Times, Cleveland Scene, and St. Louis' Riverfront Times.

MARESI STARZMANN

The Trump era was an important object lesson in the vulnerability of a political system founded on white supremacy. If institutionalized racism has always been at the base of American democracy, radical right-wing ideologies have gained new currency under an administration that has emboldened far-right extremists and mainstreamed their beliefs.

In Trump's America, the count of right-wing hate groups has risen significantly. As the Southern Poverty Law Center has documented, the number of white nationalist groups increased by 55% between 2017 and 2019, reaching a record high of 1,020 in 2018. Many openly advocate for violence, including terrorist attacks or a "race war." The FBI reports that the majority of domestic terror attacks in the US today, approximately 1,000 per year, are motivated by such extreme far-right ideas.

But Trump did not simply amplify and intensify right-wing ideologies through divisive rhetoric, he also anchored them in policy and law. His administration hired members and allies of hate groups into high-level positions. And Trump personally sought to undermine an independent judiciary by attacking judges and tilting courts in favor of his appointees.

While the rise of hate violence in America is deeply unsettling, I retain some hope that intervention by political organizers and community leaders is possible. What is more troubling, to me, is Trump's success in legitimizing a far right-wing policy agenda that will have consequences for decades to come.

Maresi Starzmann is a Research Associate at the Vera Institute of Justice, a national non-profit research and policy organization. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from Binghamton University. Views expressed are her own.

JULIE HOLLAR

When Donald Trump declared victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016, corporate media began soul-searching, wondering how they could have gotten it so wrong—and the last four years have shown how rotten that soul is. Believing they just hadn't

spent enough time really understanding Trump supporters, establishment journalists have filed countless chin-scratching puff pieces interviewing folks from "Trump Country." But with no evaluation of whether those supporters' proclamations have any basis in reality, what is the function of such reporting besides to reinforce them?

The whole framing of the problem is wrong: We already know plenty about what Trump supporters believe. Journalism's deepest failure hasn't been its lack of attention to them; it has been its inability to stop normalizing Trump and Trumpism—of which the uncritical Trump supporter stories are part and parcel.

Every time a news outlet writes gently and inquisitively about "the Nazi sympathizer next door," or waters down Trump's racism and xenophobia, or paints his unprecedented weaponization of the powers of government against his opponents as a spat between him and his cabinet, or deems his press briefings newsworthy, no matter how much misinformation they contain or how much credibility they unjustifiably confer on him, or insists on an "objectivity" that must conjure an equivalence between "both sides" no matter how extreme one side might be, the media reinforce the idea that Trump—and support for Trump—simply fits into the usual narratives of democratic politics.

By repeatedly conferring legitimacy on a fundamentally antidemocratic president and his actions, media paved the way for our country's dangerous slide toward authoritarianism — which will surely not end with the 2020 election.

Julie Hollar is the managing editor of Extra!, the magazine of Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), the national progressive media watchdog group, challenging corporate media bias, spin and misinformation.

LINDA MARTÍN ALCOFF

The idea that a audiotope of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump referring to women in vile ways would solidify a female vote for his opponent was uninformed, poorly thought through, and even sexist in its own way. Women are divided by race, class, sexuality, religion, immigration status, and region of the country in which they live. Our well-being is in almost all cases intertwined with the men in our lives: concerns about economic stability and the carceral state cross gender lines. Both Latinas and Asian Americans have significant internal divisions of nationality that incite memories of war. And in truth, many women simply do not identify with the well-dressed, conventionally attractive, white middle class women who Trump preyed upon. This accords with a fact prosecutors know well, that female jurors can be harder on rape victims: blaming or disbelieving female accusers renders the illusion that the rest of us are less vulnerable and thus need be less scared.

Identity politics has been hijacked by elites who disassemble our complex social identities and ignore those aspects of our lives that require radical and systemic solutions. In the face of this, the focus on identity based concerns needs to become more thoroughly intersectional. #MeToo is winning significant legal reforms, yet too few impact the broad multi-racial working class. The truth is, women in lower paid professions are the likeliest victims of on-the-job sexual harassment, but their ability to navigate around pig-bosses has everything to do with their immigration status, whether they have a union, whether they have an employed partner who can handle the bills while

Continued on next page

WHAT WE LEARNED

Continued from previous page

they look for another job. Some may have voted for Trump on the basis of his promise to create jobs, precisely because they hoped this, and his alliance with social conservatives, would help them fend off the dicks at work. Sexual harassment is an employment issue that affects women as a class, but the means by which we can manage the problem differs according to our intersectional situation.

Linda Martín Alcoff is a professor of philosophy at Hunter College. She is the author of Rape and Resistance and The Future of Whiteness.

SEAN PETTY

The lack of respect for science has been a hallmark of these past four years. It is accurate, although one-sided, to place primary responsibility on Trump for the historic and intentional failure to prevent hundreds of thousands of American deaths from COVID-19. Years of favoring privatization and defunding public health infrastructure by both political parties was never going to be overcome overnight once the pandemic hit. Indeed, Gov. Andrew Cuomo's central political legacy in healthcare prior to COVID-19 was decreasing the amount of hospital beds and decreasing Medicaid spending in New York. And then there's the intransigence nationally and locally of both political parties to anything resembling universal healthcare access.

As a nurse, I got to see first hand the entire spectrum of pathological lying to the public during this crisis — Trump saying Covid-19 was under control, Cuomo saying we had enough personal protective equipment and Mayor Bill De Blasio saying opening schools was safe. The bipartisan lack of commitment to public health and a public safety net as a subset of the pernicious and opportunistic anti-science denialism very much helped further the spread of the virus and made the experience of caring for people during this pandemic an unmitigated hellscape.

This denialism of course has been mirrored in the larger, more existential crisis of our generation — climate change. While Trump denies its existence, the Democrats practice a different form of denial in the idea that there is compatibility between supporting fracking and profit-driven climate solutions with the future of human existence on the planet earth.

Sean Petty is a nurse at the Jacobi Medical Center in the Bronx and a member of the executive board of the New York State Nurses Association.

DANNY KATCH

Starting the day after the 2016 election, people decided they had to get more involved with...something. Whether expressed through volunteering, running for local office, or going to a protest, millions shared an understanding that Trump's shocking victory was an indictment of a dangerously broken political system that could no longer be trusted to function without their active participation.

Many named that system capitalism, and the result has been a sudden revival of American socialism—with scores of elected officials, a thriving subculture of publications and podcasts, and an 87,000 member strong Democratic Socialists of America—has been almost as stunning as Trump's election.

When a marginalized idea goes mainstream, there is always the danger of diluted demands and co-opted leaders. Will the price of socialism's further growth be its redefinition—as many liberals would prefer—as a handful of mild measures that leave arrogant billionaires mildly annoyed but still firmly in charge? The answer will likely be determined less by what is said in Congressional de-

bates, Twitter rants, or even voting booths than by what is done in workplaces, schools, and highways.

The heart of socialism is that the working class majority should run society, and the emergency siren of malevolent incompetence blaring from the White House for the past four years has pushed the populace to maintain its 2016 vow to start taking matters into our own hands.

Increased voter turnout was one result, but so were student walkouts over gun violence and climate change, bombed-out police stations and toppled Confederate statues, teacher strikes demanding wealth redistribution from billionaires to poor Black and Brown students, and tech worker rallies against sexual assault and employer collaboration with the Pentagon and ICE.

We're still a long way from having the infrastructure of parties, unions, and community organizations that can seriously raise the possibility of socialist transformation that 2020 has shown we desperately need. But the last four years showed us that another world just might be possible.

Danny Katch is the author of Why Bad Governments Happen to Good People (2017) and Socialism...Seriously: A Brief Guide to Human Liberation (2015), both from Haymarket Books.

SARAH JAFFE

We knew at the beginning of the Trump era that the labor movement was in trouble, and the number of voters from union households who went Trump was one big signal of how bad things were. That number hasn't improved much in four years: 40 percent of voters from union households still backed Trump in 2020. In other words: things are still bad, and the narrow margin of victory reminds us just how bad they are.

It's because of this that the big union victories of the Trump era stand out all the more: by and large, they were won by teachers' unions, notably in Los Angeles and once again in Chicago, though many people probably think first of the "Red for Ed" movement kicked off in 2018 in West Virginia. But in both "red" and "blue" states the fights contained many important lessons: that the public sector is worth fighting for and a ground on which labor can win; that teachers across ideological backgrounds can come together to fight for their students and themselves; that parents and students will stand with their teachers if it's made clear that the gains are for all; that teachers are well positioned to win gains for the broader working class in what's called "bargaining for the common good"; and perhaps most importantly in the Trump years, that fighting racism, xenophobia, and sexism are part and parcel of union struggles. The Chicago teachers, whose 2012 strike provided the model that education unions have drawn from ever since, put racial justice at the forefront of their demands, and from St. Paul to Los Angeles, teachers have incorporated the lessons of movement struggles to demand defunding school police, protections for immigrant students, and even access to housing at the bargaining table. These demands helped the teachers win where other unions were losing.

Sarah Jaffe is a labor journalist and reporting fellow at Type Media Center and the author of Necessary Trouble and Work Won't Love You Back (Jan. 2021).

KAREN MALPEDE

Democrats inherit catastrophe from Republicans—illegal invasions, economic collapse, a pandemic, the denial of truth and science. Obama patched things up. The Biden Administration is tasked with saving organized life on earth. Of course, they are not up to it. But, just maybe, we are.

Having joined forces to elect a man who went along with stuff—the crime bill, Clarence Thomas, Iraq—we need him, now, to go along with us: 350.Org, Extinc-

tion Rebellion, Sunrise Movement, Black Lives Matter, a Green New Deal. We must insist upon and push meaningful climate legislation and real change: renewable energy, sustainable transportation, health projects for the common good, much more. Hundreds of thousands are dying from a pandemic that did not have to be—had we had universal health care and sound environmental justice policies.

Trumpism was the last gasp of Reaganism. We require a rapid turn toward veganism: eat some meat, if you must, but eat with conscious understanding of who has died to give you what you need, including meat packers and creatures. Consume with the principles of "an honorable harvest", to quote Native botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer: the indigenous way of being in which everyone has enough, no one uses more than they need, and we return to the living earth what we take. Climate health is not separate from public health. Right now, we and our world are sick and dying. It need not be so. We are alive, together, on a living planet; all is connected. Time is running out. These could be the most exciting years any of us have lived: the contagion of changing consciousness from grasping to caring would be euphoric. Think of living at a time when creativity and collectivity give new, rich meaning to every life and we join with Gaia to thrive.

Karen Malpede is a playwright, co-founder of Theater Three Collaborative and a professor of environmental justice and theater at John Jay College.

“WE’RE IN A RACE AGAINST TIME”

THE LEFT IS GAINING STRENGTH, SAYS AUTHOR/ORGANIZER JONATHAN SMUCKER. BUT CAN IT GO THE DISTANCE?

BY JOHN TARLETON

Jonathan Smucker’s first book — *Hegemony How-To: A Roadmap For Radicals* — was an unlikely hit that enjoyed the gift of good timing

Equal parts memoir, field manual and work of a trained sociologist, *Hegemony How-To* was released in January 2017, just as millions of previously complacent Americans joined “The Resistance” to Donald Trump’s presidency. The book delivers a tough love diagnosis of the left’s self-defeating behaviors that is informed by Smucker’s Forrest Gump-like journey through various radical subcultures and identities: Catholic Worker, anarchist tree sitter, punk rock enthusiast, global justice activist, antiwar arrestee, Occupier.

Smucker also makes a demand of the left: Get serious about contesting for power. “We’re in a race against time to build the movements that can win big,” he says.

Since returning from Berkeley, Calif., to where he grew up in Lancaster County, Pa., Smucker has been busy following his own advice, co-founding Pennsylvania Stands Up, a grassroots organization that has elected a slew of leftwing officeholders and played a key role in narrowly flipping Pennsylvania from Trump to Biden in the presidential election.

Smucker’s second book, *F*ckers at the Top*, will be released in 2021. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

INDYPENDENT: *After several years of intense political engagement spanning the Trump presidency and the defeat of Bernie Sanders as well as Elizabeth Warren, many people on the left are feeling disoriented right now. Watching the same old swampy corporate Democrats land important posts in the Biden administration isn’t easy to stomach either. Yet, you remain optimistic. Why is that?*

JS: When I think about how Bernie won the first three caucuses and primaries, I really believe we could have won and transformed the direction and the leadership of the Democratic Party. But we lost. We didn’t do it. That’s profoundly disappointing. But we have to see this moment for how dynamic it is.

The ground is quickly shifting beneath the feet of the Democratic establishment. Across the country, electorally, we have a bigger foothold than anything working people and progressive people’s organizations have had in decades. There’s AOC and the Squad in Congress. There are scores of progressive people’s champions that have been winning offices across the country including many we’ve backed here in Pennsylvania.

After 40 years of progressive infrastructure atrophy, we’re experiencing a renaissance of social movements. It’s going to take time to build up the leadership, to build up the bench of skilled candidates, campaigners and organizers to support that. Still, we’re leaps and bounds ahead of where we were just four years ago.

What has changed?

For decades, there was this chasm on the left between electoral work and movement work. I’ve always been on the movement side of it. I thought elections were important, but my line was that our work is to build the movement and wield that power to pressure whoever is in office. That chasm between electoral work and issue work or movement work evaporated overnight with Trump’s election.

When we held our first meeting for Lancaster Stands Up right after Trump’s election, there were 300 people in the room and 80% of them had not been involved with politics other than voting. For them, it was just clear, we’re going to have to protest — to do something to push back and mitigate the damage of a Trump administration — but also who gets elected matters, we’re going to have to beat him electorally. We’re gonna have to run other candidates. The old chasm

doesn’t make sense to people. The common sense shifted.

Many on the left urged support for Biden, arguing that a Democratic president could be held accountable in a way that isn’t possible when the Republicans are in power. That really didn’t happen with Obama. Why will it go differently this time?

Our movements and organizations are much more powerful, much more developed than they were when Obama came to power. Also, there’s the crisis we’re in as a country. We’re going to lead lots of campaigns, some of them are going to work, some of them aren’t, but the bottom line is we have to build people power and frame popular issues that are hard for politicians to resist.

Do you foresee another upsurge in left populist candidates running in 2021 and 2022?

I do, but it’s not automatic. We have popular majoritarian positions on the issues. But, the quality of the candidates, their campaigning skills, and their staff really matters. It’s not enough to just have an analysis of the objective situation; learn relevant skills to help build the capacity that we need to outmaneuver the establishment.

You’ve had quite a journey through the left over the past quarter-century. How do you look back on your transition from engaging in political activism on the margins of society to what you’re doing today?

It was clear to me from when I was 17 and went to my first protest that this is not going to do anything unless we get much bigger. That was intuitively clear to me. But at the same time, I found a deep sense of community and belonging in activist subcultures that nourished me. So I would often suspend my better judgement. I was holding out hope that something would shift someday.

I did have this epiphany when I was 25 and an activist spoke at a class I was taking. When he presented what his group was doing, it just struck me, “Oh! It’s a ritual!” What they’re doing is ritual. It is not aimed at winning or changing the political terrain. It is aimed at affirming an identity and building a community. That’s when I started writing about collective rituals versus strategic engagement. Later I developed that into the “life of the group” versus “what the group accomplishes beyond itself.”

Why do you think the left’s tendency to create insular subcultures has weakened in recent years?

The big reason is just what’s at stake for people. Movements are no longer dominated by the children of an expanding upper middle class who are figuring out their political expression. This is a precarious generation that has real material concerns that need to be addressed, and instead the system is failing them. The other factor is people on the left are getting a taste of winning and it whets the appetite for more.

You have a new book due out in 2021 called *F*ckers at the Top*. What’s it about?

It’s about the political realignment that’s under way amid a system-wide crisis of legitimacy that status quo forces cannot resolve. It’s very practical too. It’s about the organizing and the rhetorical tactics of groups like the Sunrise Movement and Justice Democrats and candidates like AOC — how they won. But also how Trump won.

We’re in a race against time to build the multiracial, urban and rural working-class movements that can win big and transform the Democratic Party into a party that fights for working people and delivers something like the social-democratic reforms of the New Deal.

If we don’t name the culprits who have rigged the economic and political system and pick the fights we’re picking right now for universal economic and social rights that lift up everyone, the authoritarian right will consolidate power and define the bottom v. top populist struggles of the next 10–20 years with devastating consequences.

A longer version of this interview appears at indypendent.org.

LYNNE FOSTER



AMANDA MOORE

REACHING ACROSS BORDERS

FOR U.S.-MEXICO RELATIONS, THE REAL HOPE POST-TRUMP LIES WITH ENERGIZED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

BY LAURA CARLSEN

If any country on earth should be breathing a huge sigh of relief about now, it's Mexico. Four years of bashing, bullying, trade threats and White Supremacist machinations will presumably end with the ignominious exit of Donald J. Trump. That's got to be good news.

Yet Mexico, for the most part, did not respond with cheering in the streets. There was a marked absence of the universal enthusiasm for the post-Trump reset on U.S.-Mexico relations that one might expect, considering that more than 90% of the population held a negative opinion of Trump, according to polls. That's even higher than Trump's 79% disapproval rating among Hispanics in the U.S.

The mixed reaction had much to do with the response of Mexico's president Andres Manuel López Obrador. López Obrador, known by his initials as AMLO, refused to recognize the election results, announcing he would wait for Trump's legal challenges to be resolved. Even after Trump authorized the GSA to begin the transition, Lopez Obrador has held back, standing almost alone on the world stage, in the questionable company of Vladimir Putin and Jair Bolsonaro. At this writing with most state results certified, Mexico's center-left leader still has not congratulated Joe Biden.

Although AMLO argued that his decision shows Mexico's commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, the pretext doesn't hold water. First, because out of eight elections held during his administration so far, AMLO joined the rest of the world in the common practice of recognizing the winner after the vote count in six of those nations. Second, because the reason given — to await the result of court cases — explicitly gave credence to Trump's baseless legal claims. And finally, because even as the court cases crumbled and Trump's attempt to influence state legislatures not to certify or to release electors failed, AMLO still did not recognize Biden.

This means that the Mexican government's stance is not a diplomatic principle, but either political or transac-

tional—political in the sense of actually preferring a Trump victory and attempting to bolster a fizzled GOP attempt to revert the popular vote, or transactional in the sense of getting something in return for humoring Donald Trump. The rumors of secret deals abound. Most suspicion falls on the bizarre capture and liberation of Mexico's former Secretary of Defense, General Salvador Cienfuegos.

Cienfuegos was arrested in Los Angeles and charged with drug trafficking and money laundering, following a multiyear investigation by the DEA. Prosecutors claimed to have a strong case against the general, including taped conversations with the H-2 cartel. Then William Barr, at Trump's bidding, intervened in the New York District Court and Cienfuegos was sent back to Mexico with no charges. Trying Cienfuegos in the US would likely have revealed widespread corruption in the armed forces, at a time when AMLO has gone out of his way to keep the armed forces close, handing them construction projects, port management and even COVID vaccination distribution. Returning Cienfuegos to Mexico where the government can control a trial or obviate it altogether is a political favor. But for what in return?

The other possibility is concern over what Trump might do in the two and half months between his defeat and his departure. Fear of the real power the US has over Mexico has been the driving force of US-Mexico relations under AMLO. Trump's threat to impose a 25% tariff led to a Mexican crackdown on Central American migrants and the infamous "Remain in Mexico" program to send asylum seekers back over the border to wait months for legal hearings in dangerous refugee camps.

We may never know realpolitik behind the AMLO's constant praise of a dishonest businessman who sought to establish unfettered white, male rule in the world's most pow-

alive the dream of social justice under his government. An alliance to support the goals of the Fourth transformation in Mexico and progressives in the United States could be the basis for a powerful and just relationship that could change history.

But let's be realistic. Both presidents will likely disappoint on that count. Biden has been a staunch supporter of the militarized war on drugs and private sector-led development that feeds inequality. AMLO has talked about ending neoliberalism as he promotes megaprojects and extractive industries that displace indigenous peoples and damage the environment.

Fortunately, the real hope doesn't lie with the governments. It relies on recognizing the power and vision of progressive grassroots organizing. The massive participation of the Latino population in the elections—not just in terms of record voter turnout, but also in mobilization—was in general a targeted campaign to oust Trump in order to move forward on a much broader, longer-term program. United We Dream, the 400,000 strong immigrant youth led network based on DACA students, stated shortly after the election. "We rolled out one of the largest electoral programs ever led by immigrant youth in the United States... This decisive victory is a mandate by voters and those of us who couldn't vote but energized and mobilized others to the polls, to reject greed and white supremacy, and to vote for policies that value people over profit. But our win doesn't end here." The surge in grassroots mobilization in the US is an opportunity for movements to build common cause.

Immigration obviously links the two nations, but so do other issues. The Movement for Black Lives' calls for racial justice, defunding the police and ending brutality should find easy echo with Mexican demands to withdraw the military from public safety, end the war on drugs and reform prisons. Movements in defense of indigenous people's rights and lands, to end violence against women and stop global warming, and for labor rights and drug policy reform (Mexico just legalized marijuana) already know each other, but they have an erratic history of joint efforts.

As the leaders retool the relationship, it's time for movements to do the same. Stale arguments on how progressive the presidents are lead to nowhere. They will always have limitations. The challenge is to use the grassroots energy, the radicalization of the past six months, the emergence of new social leaders and the increased articulation of movements to look over the border as well. Before the pandemic, Mexico also experienced record numbers in the streets, in the March 8 Women's March. Harnessing that energy and commitment and channeling at least part of it into binational efforts can only make both sides stronger.

Laura Carlsen is the director of the Americas Program of the Center for International Policy based in Mexico City.

STALE ARGUMENTS ON HOW PROGRESSIVE THE PRESIDENTS ARE LEAD TO NOWHERE. THEY WILL ALWAYS HAVE LIMITATIONS.

erful nation. So where does that leave us now? The Biden administration is reportedly miffed, but has nothing to gain by punishing Mexico. Biden will have to move fast to undo Trump's deals and make the relationship more transparent and oriented to human rights and common principles. AMLO's Trump-appeasement policy has created obstacles to future efforts to rebuild badly damaged US-Mexico relations, but not insurmountable ones.

Biden comes into office with a divided country and party, but a strong and mobilized base for social change. He also takes office with a political debt to Hispanics, and to progressives. AMLO completed his second year in a surprisingly strong position, with an estimated 60% approval rating despite the tragic results of his laissez-faire strategy on COVID-19, economic pain and political blunders. Programs that prioritize the poor and target corruption have kept



PAUL KAGAME/FUCKR

AUTHORITARIANISM WINS BIG IN TANZANIA

RECENT ELECTIONS SHOW HOW A FULLY EMPOWERED AUTOCRAT CAN DEMOLISH A COUNTRY'S CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

STRONGMAN: Tanzanian President John Magufuli.

Tanzanian Elections Watch, an international panel independently monitoring the vote, also confirmed allegations of vote tampering. “Glaring facts” show the election was neither free nor fair, Ssempebwa said.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

BY SOPHIE NEIMAN

When veteran opposition leader Tundu Lissu returned to Tanzania in August, after three years in exile and with a daring plan to challenge incumbent John Magufuli in the October presidential elections, he was cautiously optimistic.

There were few reasons to be hopeful. In 2017, gunmen fired 16 bullets into his body in broad daylight in a harrowing attempt on his life. Lissu, a human rights lawyer, former parliamentarian and vice chair of Chadema, the leading opposition party, was airlifted to Kenya and then to Belgium for a lengthy recovery, all while the Tanzanian government refused to investigate his would-be killers. During Lissu's absence, Magufuli of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party cracked down on critics, shuttering newspapers and nonprofits.

But upon his arrival at the international airport in Dar es Salaam this summer, Lissu was greeted by cheering crowds waving green palms fronds. Those supporters followed him everywhere he went on the campaign trail, as he bluntly criticized Magufuli and promised to lead an administration guided by its respect for freedom of expression.

As the crowds around him swelled, he thought he might have a fighting chance.

He was wrong. Just a few months after his arrival in his homeland, Lissu was back in exile in Belgium, having fled for his life. Magufuli had won in a dubious landslide, with the vote marred by allegations of widespread rigging and violence. For Americans who recently wondered whether their electoral democracy could survive the machinations of a would-be strongman and his political allies, Tanzania's experience points to how a fully empowered autocrat can demolish a country's constitutional system.

“We didn't have an election,” Lissu told the Independent, speaking from the Flemish town of Tienen on the outskirts of Brussels. “We didn't have what would pass for an election under any, any, any law.”

INCREASING AUTHORITARIANISM

A relatively unknown bureaucrat in the ministry of public works when he came to power in 2015, Magufuli portrayed himself as a man of the people. Nicknamed the “Bulldozer,” his anti-corruption stance quickly won him accolades at home and in the region, and inspired the hashtag #WhatWouldMagufuliDo. But the President brooked no dissent in this East African nation of 58 million, as he sought to build a number of costly mega-infrastructure projects, with a nationalist mindset.

“Everybody is at risk — risk of serious harm to their lives, to their property,” said Fatma Karume, a prominent Tanzanian lawyer, recently sacked from her job for criticizing the government and subsequently disbarred. She's contesting the decision in court.

Members of the opposition, Karume added, are “an endangered species. They have been in danger since 2015.”

The brutal attack on Lissu, which many believe was ordered by Magufuli's government, is the most prominent example of violence against the opposition, but it is not the only one. In June, Chadema chairman Freeman Mbowe was viciously beaten by unidentified people, who fractured his right leg in an ambush colleagues say was politically motivated.

Other opposition leaders have suffered similar attacks. Just weeks after Mbowe was beaten, Zitto Kabwe, head of the opposition Alliance for Change and Transparency or ACT-Wazalendo, was also arrested at the internal meeting, and charged with illegal assembly.

In the lead-up to voting day, both Lissu and Seif Sharif Hamad, the opposition presidential candidate for Tanzania's semi-autonomous Zanzibar Archipelago, were accused of violating election rules and were banned from campaigning for seven days.

The worst was yet to come.

A BLOODSTAINED ELECTION

Amidst reports that security forces had shot and killed at least 9 people protesting planned ballot stuffing in Zanzibar ahead of Tanzania's October 28 elections, the internet was shut down on the island and on the mainland. With communications obscured, violence continued on the election day and the days that followed.

“I was very scared,” said one woman who asked to remain anonymous, citing safety concerns. “I couldn't even go and vote myself, because I was scared for my life.” Photos seen by the Indy show people with bullet wounds, and with bruises, burns and cuts. Ismail Jussa, a representative of ACT-Wazalendo in Zanzibar, was so badly brutalized that his shoulder and leg fractured in multiple places.

“Jussa was beaten in police custody. They had already arrested him. There was no reason to beat him,” said Kabwe, the ACT-Wazalendo leader.

With these attacks came allegations of rigging. Chadema reported that a number of its polling agents, previously mobilized to monitor the vote, were blocked at gunpoint, and accused the ruling party of stuffing ballot boxes with papers pre-ticked for Magufuli.

Frederick Ssempebwa, a Ugandan lawyer and member of

After Magufuli was declared the winner with more than 80% of the vote, the opposition called for massive protests demanding the election be annulled. But with fear of violence still high, these demonstrations never materialized. Magufuli's victory was swiftly recognized by China, which has long-standing diplomatic and economic ties with the Tanzanian government and is locked in a great-power rivalry with the U.S. for influence across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regional leaders were also quick to congratulate Magufuli, including President Yoweri Museveni who has ruled Uganda for more than three decades, and who even traveled to Tanzania to attend his counterpart's swearing-in ceremony.

Meanwhile, Lissu was running for his life.

He'd received two telephone calls telling him the President planned to finish him off once and for all, and the security detail assigned to him during the campaign had disappeared. He hid first in the house of friends, and was briefly detained by the police before finding refuge at the home of a European ambassador and deciding to return to Belgium.

“I intend to carry on the struggle from outside the country, to denounce this regime, expose its crimes [and] demand the international community take action to punish these criminals,” Lissu said. “I have no intention of staying quietly in Europe.”

Some of this work has already begun, with Tanzanian activists submitting formal letters to the International Criminal Court in the Hague, asking it to probe violence and electoral misconduct in Tanzania.

Back home, however, the President has secured not only a personal victory, but a super majority in Parliament, ensuring a pliant legislature. The political opposition has been dealt a series of near-fatal blows. It has been effectively shut out of government, and claims that more than 100 of its members and supporters were temporarily detained during the chaotic election period. Lawyers for the opposition also told Amnesty International that the death toll had risen to at least 22 by November 11.

The exact numbers of deaths, attacks and arrests are difficult to determine, but both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called for independent investigations into Tanzania's elections.

In the wake of a bloody vote, the threat of future violence and increasingly anti-democratic policies loom over Magufuli's next term in office.

DRAWN TO THE NEWS

NYC PAINTER TURNS HEADLINES INTO ART

BY JULIA THOMAS

On the morning of Nov. 4, Elise Engler woke up early on her couch after falling asleep while watching the presidential election results play out on a computer screen. She'd reminded herself that the results might not be immediately known, that the long election season might carry on for an undetermined number of additional days.

She felt bowled over with uncertainty and a visceral foggy. She then sat down and drew the story that spoke to her from the morning's headlines, as she had done on each of the previous 1,836 days. Engler's "Diary of a Radio Junkie" project, where she draws the day's current events, had begun on Nov. 21, 2015, as an experimental "year of watching the news." The drawings are a personalized, immediate response to the news cycle, and a mode of reflection that is at once a time capsule and a human reflection of the news in all its messiness and intensity. To look at Engler's work is to witness a person's mental and emotional journey through the cycle of current events, the push and pull between different moments across the United States and the globe.

A 64-year-old artist and educator in New York City, Engler normally turns immediately to the radio in her studio to listen to news. On the morning after Election Day, she looked at her phone with trepidation. When she saw that Trump had fewer electoral votes, it gave her a glimmer of hope.

"November 4, 2020," she wrote in pencil on a white square of paper. "U.S. presidential election remains undecided." Using watercolors, she painted a murky and pale version of the presidential seal, with the eagle submerged in blue, and gray streaks breaching the traditional yellow boundaries of the symbol of American democracy.

"The whole fact of the presidency had become this gray area, this messy, this dripping, oozing [thing]," Engler told *The Independent*. She painted over the presidential seal repeatedly, blotting it with a rag again and again, adding white to the image to heighten the bleakness of the gray color. Normally, she likes to start with a fresh slate by replacing the water in the yogurt container she uses to dip her brush into when painting. On that day, however, she opted to use dirty water.

During the first year of her experiment, she set out to draw one story per day about whatever topic she encountered first when she turned on the radio. But when Trump was declared winner in 2016, Engler resolved to keep the project going. "I realized that I really had to keep going, because I was going to be chronicling probably a very extraordinary and frightening experience," she said.

"Diary of a Radio Junkie" now spans more than five years of documenting the events of each day in ink or watercolors. Her chronicles of the last year will be published as a book, entitled *A Diary of the Plague Year: An Illustrated Chronicle of 2020*, by Metropolitan Books in November 2021. Engler has drawn these artworks from her home studio, in transit and when she's far away from New York. With the exception of 11 days when she enlisted the help of guest artists, friends and colleagues, she has not missed a day of



SUE BRECK

processing current events.

The drawings, which are illustrated in a patchwork, comic style, are pinned across the walls of her studio in a collage of vibrant colors punctuated by black-and-white scenes, detailed sketches, and recurring images. Most recently: the blue-gloved hands of doctors, a map of the United States glowing orange to represent the latest spike in coronavirus cases, and COVID-19 particles signifying the pandemic. Engler's work details the story of the last five years with consistency, in a news cycle that is both constantly changing and simultaneously repetitive, devastating and exhausting.

"I try and think, 'Okay, how am I going to make this drawing really represent today and not think about what was yesterday?'" Engler says. "Today I'm going to figure out what today is."

In many ways, the project is an extension of her daily practice and a challenge that flowed naturally out of her artistic approach, which often centers around ritualistic and hyper-focused documentation. Before she decided to focus on the news, Engler illustrated all 13,197 objects in her Upper West Side apartment, her home of almost 40 years; she painted the contents of 75 women's handbags, a project she describes as a mode of "portraiture"; while on an artist fellowship to Antarctica with the National Science Foundation, she drew all the items necessary to support life at the research stations; and for almost one year, she documented all 252 blocks of Broadway in Manhattan, partly as a reaction to being hit by a truck while riding her bicycle.

As with all of her projects, Engler was curious to deeply explore the environments she — and others — inhabited, from angles known and overlooked, documenting the many modes of existence and ways of being. Once she decides who and what she is drawing, she searches for an image online and does the painting based on that.

"Most of my work starts out in small increments," she says. "Then, because there's so many components, it becomes massive."

The act of listening to current events, rather than watching or reading about them, was a rule from the get-go for Engler, who is a self-described "news addict." She started reading *The New York Times* when she was 11, and remembers hiding the transistor radio under the blankets at night, listening to campaigns to get stations to play Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant."

Had she not become an artist, she envisions that she might have become a reporter or radio producer. She grew up in a progressive, politically engaged family, her mother an accountant and her father a political economist. Her parents' fields and worldviews, she says, significantly influenced how she thinks about art.

"The premise behind a lot of my work is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts," Engler reflects. "Between the two of them, I feel like I'm sort of assembling and counting and combining

many, many parts to make a bigger picture."

For many years, she painted with the radio on, enjoying the dynamism of human voices as opposed to silence or music. That didn't change when she began "Diary of a Radio Junkie"; like she always had, Engler tuned in as early as 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. She listened to local stations, like the NPR affiliate WNYC or community radio WBAL, and to national and global outlets like NPR, the BBC, and *Democracy Now!* The drawings take anywhere from 30 minutes to six hours, depending on her availability, energy and vision for them.

Her process of choosing how and which stories to de-

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER DRAWING: Elise Engler at work in her home studio.

pict in drawings has evolved significantly. In the first few days of Trump's presidency, Engler decided it was necessary to draw more than one news story per day, since it was becoming increasingly overwhelming to select just one topic to paint. She first decided to draw multiple stories on Jan. 15, 2017: Trump had verbally attacked Rep. John Lewis on Twitter, and the same day, the Ringling Brothers announced the end of their touring circus.

"I thought, 'Oh my God, this is perfect. I can do a painting of these cavorting elephants, and Trump insulting John Lewis,'" Engler said. Now she incorporates multiple headlines into each painting, though she tries to limit the number of stories she draws to seven.

She has also focused increasingly on portraits. While she has training in drawing figures and anatomy, she hadn't spent a lot of time drawing faces before "Diary of a Radio Junkie." Over time, she's noticed improvement in her own skills and chosen to be more intentional about who she draws. She hasn't drawn a full-on image of Trump in over a year and a half; instead, she's gravitated toward sketching his profile or using orange to represent him. However, Engler has chosen to draw some Trump administration figures, such as Rudy Giuliani. "I certainly do not hesitate to make him as hideous as he is, including putting a lot of green in his skin," Engler told me. In a Nov. 20 drawing documenting a press conference in which an unidentified brown slime slid down Giuliani's face, his cheeks are blended with a dark, ogre green shade.

Engler has spent lots of time on certain portraits to capture significant moments in the national news cycle — the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, the fly on Mike Pence's forehead during the vice-presidential debate and the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Protesters, doctors, and everyday people also make frequent appearances in her work.

Each day is a mix of intertwined scenes and overlapping disasters, an inked quilt of color. But a few images, such as one from last Sept. 13, focus on one story: a growing fire and mass of apocalyptic sky around the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco.

Engler is obsessively curious and open to drawing anything, but often finds herself particularly drawn to stories about climate change, health care, the Middle East, Israel-Palestine and Ecuador. These are issues close to her heart and places she has familial roots or has spent significant time in. She consistently follows stories throughout their time in the national news cycle and weaves them into her drawings as they evolve.

She's also drawn herself when the story is directly related to her own life. For last Sept. 17, she appeared in a blue mask amid a sea of COVID-19 particles, surrounded by Attorney General William Barr, the Centers for Disease Control's Dr. Robert Redfield, and Michael Caputo, the Trump loyalist installed as spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services. Trump had refuted Redfield's warning that a COVID-19 vaccine would not be readily available by November and that masks would

save lives. Engler's expression is obscured by her mask, but her eyes convey a residual exhaustion. And yet, she does not look away.

Over the last eight months, Engler has told me that she alternates between exhaustion and gratitude. She's consistently lost sleep, waking up in the middle of the night thinking of the news or rising unintentionally at 4 a.m., unable to go back to bed. This rhythm was a part of her life before the pandemic, and in a sense, the hyper-focus on the news felt familiar. While she admits to looking forward to the project's end and being able to focus on other things, she also recognizes what it's taught her about her own craft.

"I really have more stamina than I thought," she said during a conversation in her studio in November 2019.



This spring, Engler taught classes to students at City College on the art of inquiry and asking questions. She adjusted to teaching via Zoom and is learning how to find a way both to ask people to reflect on the current moment and to recognize the myriad challenges that many of her students face. This summer, she also returned to working for the city at Battery Park. After securing a book deal, she's spending more time thinking about her work as a collective whole.

"It's a matter of sort of gluing together all the pieces," she says. "But everybody sort of finds their own place within it."

WORKS OF ART:

A sampling of Elise Engler's paintings from the past five years. Her 2020 paintings will be released as a book in 2021.

FIFTY YEARS OF A BLACK PANTHER FRIENDSHIP

The Brother You Choose: Paul Coates and Eddie Conway Talk About Life, Politics, and the Revolution

BY SUSIE DAY, AFTERWORD BY TA-NEHISI COATES,
HAYMARKET BOOKS, AUGUST 2020

By Eleanor J. Bader

Fifty years ago, when Eddie Conway was the Lieutenant of Security for the Baltimore Chapter of the Black Panther Party, he was accused and later convicted of killing police officer Donald Sager and attempting to kill two other law enforcers. His sentence? Life plus 30 years.

At the time, Paul Coates was also a member of the Panthers, and like many activists, believed that Conway had been railroaded, a victim of the false—if stunningly detailed—testimony of a known informant who claimed that Conway had confessed to the shootings.

Coates had not known Conway well before the trial, and actually thought him pompous and arrogant, but his comrade's mistreatment during the proceedings—including the court's refusal to allow movement attorneys Charles Garry and William Kunstler to provide pro bono representation to Conway—rankled. In response, Coates vowed that he would do whatever he could, for as long as he could, to free Conway from prison.

Forty-four years later, in 2014, he got his wish and joyfully organized a community celebration in honor of Conway's unexpected release.

The Brother You Choose is a detailed chronicle of the men's evolving friendship, a testament to platonic love and an unparalleled explication of what it means to spend one's life promoting social justice and racial equity. But the book is also more than this: It's an account of an ongoing conversation that began five decades ago, a merger of the personal and political into a seamless narrative.

In her Preface to the book, Day writes that she first met Conway in 2012, when he was in the 42nd year of his sentence. "With my partner, Laura Whitehorn, I visited him in the Jessup Correctional Institution, just outside Baltimore. The Jessup visiting room was bleak and fluorescently lit, with the usual din of conversation from other visits going on. Yet even amid all the standardized grimness, it was actually fun to talk to Eddie."

Day describes Conway as "hearty and personable, with a keen sense of humor." Coates, on the other hand, is presented as less laid back, more rule-bound and rigid. Nonetheless, the men's decades-long relationship has given both of them a solid foundation and the book provides

readers with an edited transcript of their conversations. As the subtitle of the book indicates, topics include love, loss, child-rearing (Coates has seven children; Conway one), education, professional advancement, the state of American politics, strategies for achieving progressive social change, racism, and of course, prison conditions. Their dialogue is honest, often revelatory, as they debate, discuss, laugh, and argue. In addition, while the pair don't always see eye-to-eye, their banter is always lively and forthright.

Anger and violence are frequent topics. "Every year 600,000 prisoners are released," from jail, Conway reports. "In almost every state, those people who are released are angry." After years of abuse at the hands of prison personnel, he explains, once they are re-

leased "they explode."

That is, unless positive channels are afforded them.

For Coates, attaining an education is key, and sees formal and informal educational channels as equally beneficial, whether one is inside or outside of the prison system. This has been Coates' life's work. As founder of Black Classic Press—now in its 42nd year—he publishes books and articles about a variety of political issues, including racial justice. His commitment to this work, he told Day, was initially stoked by his desire to keep Conway and other inmates well-stocked with reading materials; since the Press' 1978 creation, BCP has published hundreds of

texts—many of them reissues of out of print pamphlets, books, and broadsheets, about African American life, culture, and struggle.

On top of this, over the years Coates worked with numerous prisoners' rights groups to demand the release of political prisoners, including Conway, and traveled to see his friend at least once a week.

Nonetheless, he admits that he was blindsided by Conway's unexpected release from prison.

"Too often, home for someone coming out of prison is effectively nowhere," Day writes. Not so for Conway. For the past five years he's lived in Baltimore, in a home Coates owns but does not live in. What's more, he's found work as an executive producer at The Real News Network, a daily online news show. Today, at age 74, Conway continues to fight white supremacy and advocate

for the more than two million human beings currently locked up in US prisons and jails. Coates, for his part, continues to run BCP.

In his Afterword to *The Brother You Choose*, Paul Coates' son, Ta-Nehisi, writes that, "Even if Black people listen and do exactly what we're supposed to do, it doesn't work...We endure so many losses. There are those folks who go on, no matter what, but a lot of folks get despondent and sink into despair...But here's what's important, no matter the result: If you stand up, in some profound way, you're already achieving something."

Both Paul Coates and Eddie Conway have stood up for decades and their example showcases the power of friendship, commitment, and loyalty. What's more, no matter how much work is left undone—no matter how much of a mess the world continues to be in—their friendship remains beautiful, important, and inspiring.



GARY MARTIN

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MUTUAL AID FOR DUMMIES

Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And The Next)

BY DEAN SPADE
VERSO, 2020

By Renée Feltz

Out of both compassion and necessity, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many of us to engage in mutual aid projects — such as signing up to buy groceries for an immuno-compromised neighbor, or helping tutor a child struggling with remote learning — even if we don't fully understand the concept. Fortunately, Dean Spade has written an accessible primer with practical tips for people who want to start mutual aid projects or who are already in them and want to see them flourish.

At just over 150 pages, his book can easily live in your day bag in order to be consulted regularly. It is broken into two parts. The first defines mutual aid as “collective coordination to meet each other's needs” and examines key elements. Mutual aid tends to expose the reality that people lack what they need, while also creating spaces to meet those needs and build a shared analysis. As one historical example, Spade explains how the Black Panthers welcomed many people into the their struggle through survival programs like free breakfasts for school-age children as well as a free ambulance program, free medical clinics, a service offering rides to elderly people doing errands and schools aimed at providing a rigorous liberation curriculum for children.

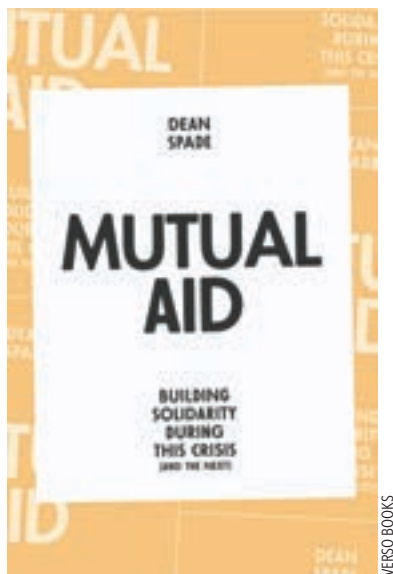
Like the projects people started more recently after Superstorm Sandy to clean out homes and share food, mutual aid efforts focus on solidarity, not charity that is designed to “improve the image of the elites” and “put a tiny, inadequate Band-Aid on the massive social wound that their greed creates.” They aim to be participatory and solve problems through collective action, while building movements. In a four-page chart, Spade drives home the characteristics that distinguish mutual aid from charity, such as supporting people who face dire conditions without imposing eligibility criteria that divide them into “deserving” and “undeserving.”

If practiced sustainably, Spade argues mutual aid can be an on-ramp for people who want to get to work right away on the things they feel urgent about. He devotes most of his attention to explaining how to “work together on purpose,” and perhaps even more importantly, ways to avoid common pitfalls like saviorism and cooptation, noting that mutual aid projects “have to work hard to remain oppo-

sitional” to the neoliberal status quo, and cultivate resistance to privatization and criminalization.

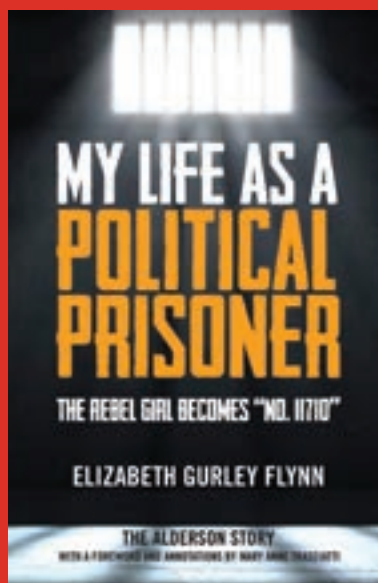
Spade is a lawyer and long-time trans activist who, with eyes wide open, acknowledges in the wonderfully named chapter “No Masters, No Flakes,” that many challenges mutual aid projects face come from within, like overwork and burnout. Paraphrasing civil rights activist and author Tonie Cade Bambara, he emphasizes we must “make resistance irresistible.” But since most of us are not used to participating in decision making, he uses more charts to summarize tendencies that can harm groups and lead to conflict, such as secrecy and exclusiveness. Other charts detail the difference between domineering and cooperative leadership, or between working compulsively versus working joyfully. His discussion of conflict as “pervasive” feels validating. His tips for addressing it, as well as tendencies like perfectionism — both as a group and as an individual — seem in some cases like therapy for those of us in the trenches.

The abolitionist activist and author Miriam Kaba said she “cheered after I read this book,” and other readers may join in her enthusiasm for its helpful guidance and useful framework for our mutual aid projects. If we improve our ability to focus on “solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors,” we can better face the challenges presented by this pandemic, and the next crisis. As Spade argues, “more people are learning how to organize mutual aid than have in decades. This is a big chance for us to make a lot of change.”



VERSO BOOKS

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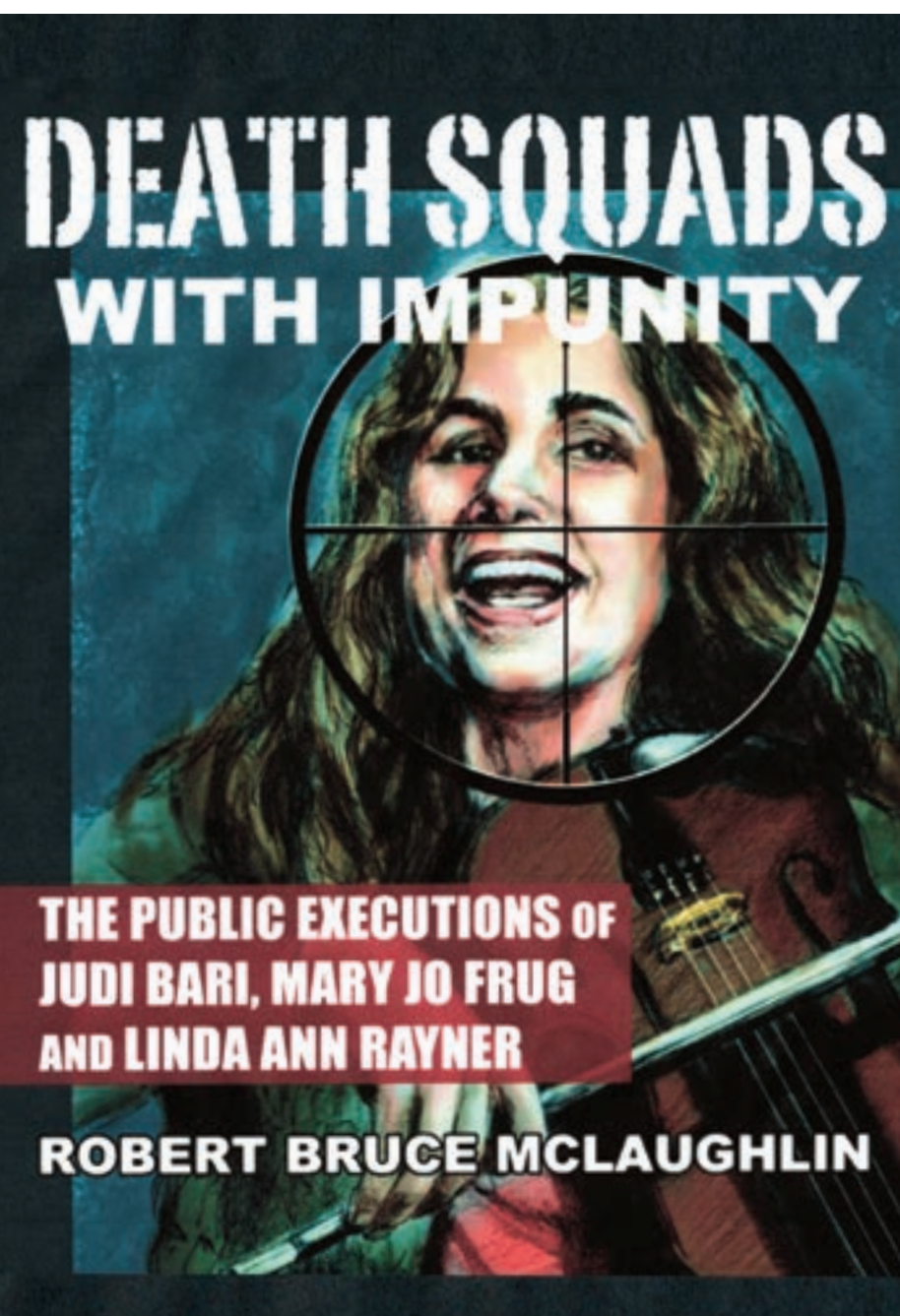
Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (1890-1964) — labor leader, activist, and feminist — played a leading role in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). She was a pioneering proponent of women's rights, birth control, and women's suffrage. She joined the Communist Party USA in 1936, and in 1961, became its chairwoman. She was incarcerated from 1955 to 1957 for her political beliefs and activities. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn died during a visit to the Soviet Union. In Red Square more than 25,000 people memorialized this fighter for her lifelong dedication to human rights.

Mary Anne Trasciatti, Ph.D., is a professor at Hofstra University where she teaches courses in Rhetoric, Women's and Labor Studies. She is President of the Board of Directors for “Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition.” Most recently she has contributed to *My Life as a Political Prisoner: The Rebel Girl Becomes “No. 11710”* by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.



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THE BROTHER YOU CHOOSE

"Too often unheard above the sirens, the desperate gasping for breath, is the consistent language of love, of tenderness, of support between men."
—asha bandele

PAUL COATES
AND EDDIE CONWAY
TALK ABOUT
LIFE, POLITICS,
AND THE REVOLUTION

SUSIE DAY

AFTERWORD BY TA-NEHISI COATES



BRANDON O'NEILL

HOLIDAY LOCKDOWN HOTLINE

Dear Billy,
I miss being around other people. I don't see my friends anymore, except on Zoom. Same with my co-workers. I also miss being around crowds of people. Now it's holiday season, and I can't travel to go see my family. This sucks. Do you have words of wisdom to share?

MARIA,
Sunnyside

pecially if the latter has better selection and cheaper prices.

CARL
Fort Greene

Dear Carl,
Smaller capitalism vs. the larger capitalism? That's a false dilemma. The two are apples and oranges. My corner grocery, Seeley Market down on the corner, is not a smaller version of Whole Foods. Everyone in Seeley knows everyone else's name and what kind of story, joke, lament, flirtation, or explanation of the universe to expect from the familiar parade of personalities.

The owner-operated companies often have loving, helping relationships within their communities. The Seeley folks, Amanee and Abbot and their family and employees - they are unsurveilled. They don't wear corporate uniforms. They are allowed to have their own home-made pace, personal slang and belief systems. They can have emotions that are not coming from the policy of some focus group study.

Small shops, cottage manufacturing and call-and-come service companies — such are the building blocks of healthy neighborhoods and towns. And this makes a higher quality of life, where the exchanges of skills and products are leavened, at least partly, by a gift economy. There is a lot of "pay us when you can." Being together in a community, you can feel how Wall Street, Silicon Valley, Washington and Hollywood, and yes, Amazon, are farther away. The drama and the fun is right here!. We're smiling a lot right here! (in our masks).

Love-a-lujah!
REV

Dear Maria,
I believe that you can use what you've been given. Don't be impatient with me now, hear me out. We all have this challenge. But loneliness can be the gateway, an opportunity. There is much that can be gained in this trying time.

Here's a mistake a lot of us have made lately, and maybe this warning will help some of you readers. In late 2020, consumer spending rose as folks bought things that they couldn't really use in a lockdown, but they wanted the act of shopping, giving a new dress a twirl in a mirror. Don't do this! Stop Shopping! Shopping doesn't solve loneliness...

Here's an idea, Maria. Take the train from Sunnyside to Coney or the Rockaways. Find where the planet pokes through our megalopolis. The Earth will come to you in thoughts and dreams if you go to it, walk along the ocean, and listen. The wildfires and super storms and the virus come from the Earth, but she also gives us a quiet joy that is the antidote. Earthalujah!

...

Hey Rev Billy,
I'm on one of the fortunate ones who still has a steady, good-paying job. I will give money to charities and some of my favorite activist groups. Question: You frequently extol the virtues of small neighborhood stores and urge us to spend our shopping dollars there. Yet, most small businesses pay low wages and provide little or no benefits for their workers. What we really need is socialism. Until then, I don't see what the difference is between buying from a small capitalist or a large capitalist es-

REVEREND BILLY IS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. HAVE A QUESTION FOR THE REVEREND? JUST EMAIL REVBILLY@INDYPENDENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.



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